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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

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CONTENTS

THE GREAT REVIEWS, by *R. G. Cox* *page* 2

OTHELLO AND THE MANGOLD-WURZELS:
Literacy in the U.S.S.R., by *A. Stawar* 21

THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM IN HOPKINS, by *W. H. Gardner* 32

CORIOLANUS, by *D. A. Traversi* 43

LITERARY CRITICISM AND PHILOSOPHY: A Reply,
by *F. R. Leavis* 59

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS 71

MRS. WOOLF AND LIFE, review by W. H. Mellers (p. 71). A NEW SYMPHONY, note by W.H.M. (p. 75). POETRY IN 1936, reviews by H. A. Mason (p. 77). MEDIÆVAL SCOTS POETRY, *Scottish Poetry from Barbour to James VI*, reviewed by John Speirs (p. 83). DETACHMENT FROM SOCIAL NORMS, *The Psychology of Social Norms*, reviewed by D. W. Harding (p. 103). ORPHEUS BRITANNICUS, *Purcell*, reviewed by Bruce Pattison (p. 106). NEW ENGLAND CULTURE, *The Flowering of New England*, reviewed by Donald Culver (p. 109). A FRENCH CRITIC, *Histoire de la Littérature Française de 1789 à nos jours*, reviewed by P. Mansell Jones (p. 116). *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, reviewed by L. G. Salingar (p. 118).

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THE GREAT REVIEWS (I)

IN a previous number of *Scrutiny* (June, 1935) Mr. Denys Thompson drew attention to the fact that throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century this country possessed a serious, intelligent and responsible journalism, providing a focus for current movements of thought and opinion, a means of livelihood and a field of action for the middlemen of letters, and an authoritative expression of critical standards. The subject is obviously one for extended study, but a very limited inquiry is sufficient to bring home the fact that the present state of periodical criticism is exceptional, and that the easy excuse that things were always the same, so often used to defend a complacent acquiescence in the contemporary critical anarchy, is simply not true. I propose to concentrate here on the period which saw the foundation of the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and *Blackwood's Magazine*, and their rapid assumption of critical authority, and within this period to consider mainly specific criticism of literature. These notes are intended as illustrations of the kind and quality of the critical work of the Reviewers: their preoccupations and preconceptions in matters of taste, their methods, and their authority and influence.

In the first place one cannot insist too strongly on the fact that the Reviews had a larger sale in actual numbers, without working out the proportion to the population, than most modern periodicals with anything approaching the same pretensions to intelligence and seriousness. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* were selling nearly 14,000 copies each at their peak period, about 1818 to 1819, and *Blackwood's* soon reached a similar sale. To this must be added the steady sale of the bound volumes, and it should be remembered that each copy was often handed round among several people. No genteel family, said Scott, could be without the *Edinburgh*, and Lord Cockburn described the effect of the first number as 'electrical':

> 'It was not merely that the journal expounded and defended right principles and objects. Its prerogative was far higher. It taught the public to think. It opened the people's eyes. It gave

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them periodically the most animated and profound discussions on every interesting subject that the greatest intellects in the kingdom could supply.'

It is significant that in *Mansfield Park*, when the company at Sotherton were tired of exploring the gardens, ' they all returned to the house together, there to lounge away the time as they could with sofas, and chit-chat, and Quarterly Reviews, till the return of the others, and the arrival of dinner.' It is unnecessary to suggest the modern social equivalent. Even their victims had to admit the power and distinction of the Reviews ; Shelley confessed to Peacock that it was the talent with which the *Quarterly* was conducted that made it such a formidable political enemy. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* were the mouthpieces of the two great political groups of cultivated society, while at the same time they defined, moulded, and partially formed the opinions of their respective parties, and exercised a literary authority which was the legitimate successor of that of Addison and Johnson. *Blackwood's* had not the same authoritative position, but it made up for this in liveliness and audacity. It was in fact doing extremely varied kinds of work at all levels of seriousness, and its criticism contains a great variety of opinions. But the general critical level was high, and the resulting section through current literary opinion is very interesting. No modern periodical, of course, could combine sheer horseplay with highbrow critical essays, but that is only an illustration of how little the reading public of 1820 was stratified. It was still possible to write for the reading public as a whole, just as it was still possible for the reviewers to examine the whole output of the publishers. Besides these three, as Mr. Thompson pointed out, there were various periodicals of smaller circulation—the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Monthly Review*, the *British Critic*, the *London Magazine*, Campbell's *New Monthly*, the political journals of Hunt and Cobbett, all contributing to that " irrigation of the surface of society ' which *Blackwood's* mentions with approval in the forty-second *Noctes Ambrosianae* (April, 1829).

II.

The first question demanding consideration is the attitude of the reviewers to the Romantic poets, and particularly to the Lake

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School. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* based their judgments firmly on the eighteenth-century principles of Reason, Truth and Nature, and although there are hints of a gradual modification of this attitude, a change which is more marked in the later *Blackwood's*, it is generally at the bar of Good Sense that the Romantics are tried. For an age which accepted Romantic standards as absolute, this procedure stood manifestly self-condemned as at once sacrilegious and obscurantist, but it ought now to be possible to consider the question without prejudice. A little examination of the actual criticism should make it clear that this detached and ironical attitude to the new school often produced extremely pertinent and profitable results. The *Edinburgh* opened the attack in its first number, with Jeffrey's long article on Southey's *Thalaba*. He begins in the orthodox eighteenth-century manner, saying that the standards of poetry ' were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to question,' and he denounces the Lake Poets as a sect of wilful eccentrics, tracing the new style back to Rousseau, Kotzebue and Schiller, to Cowper, Ambrose Philips, Quarles and Dr. Donne. It is the authors' ' unquestionably very considerable portion of poetical talent which makes them a ' formidable conspiracy against sound judgment.' His criticisms of the cult of simplicity are shrewd and intelligent, and it has been overlooked, I think, that he anticipates several of Coleridge's points against Wordsworth in the *Biographia Literaria*. His chief points are that passionate language may be simple, but that in the more prosaic intervals their method is liable to produce meanness and insipidity ; that the Wordsworthian simplicity is ' assumed and unnatural ' to an educated author, so that he will be continually deviating from it ; that ' the language of the higher and more cultivated orders . . . is adapted to poetry by having been long consecrated to its use ' and that there is in these poets an ' exaggeration of thought ' (Coleridge's ' mental bombast '):

> ' There must be a *qu'il mourût* and a " let there be light " in every line . . . A whole poem cannot be made up of striking passages.'

His final judgment, amply supported by examples, is that Southey possesses ' an amiable mind, a cultivated fancy and a perverted

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taste.' Later reviews of Southey placed him finally as second-rate: already in the article on *Madoc* (Oct., 1805) Jeffrey speaks of his 'diffuse and interminable redundancy,' and remarks that the great easiness of his loose and colloquial blank verse 'will one day be his ruin.' The *Quarterly* treated him more kindly, though Scott's praise of *Kehama* was not unqualified (Feb., 1811). *Blackwood's* once referred to him as a poet of the very highest order (*Noctes Ambrosianae*, Dec., 1828), but the review of the *Life of Wesley* (Feb., 1824) says that 'he himself is now the only man who ever alludes to Southey's poems,' and the *Tale of Paraguay* is described (Sept., 1825) as 'with many paltry, and a few fine passages, an exceedingly poor poem, feeble alike in design and execution.'

The *Edinburgh's* first review of Wordsworth was the article on the *Poems* (July, 1807). The merits of the *Lyrical Ballads* are admitted: 'in spite of their occasional vulgarity, affectation and silliness, they were undoubtedly characterized by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling,' but Wordsworth is described as a mannerist, and his childishness ('some namby-pamby to the small celandine') and bathos ('a Hymn on Washing-day, sonnets to one's grandmother—or Pindarics on gooseberry-pye') are particularly attacked. At the same time several exceptions are noticed: the *Song at Brougham Castle* is highly praised, together with the sonnets and *The Happy Warrior*. As for the summary dismissal of the *Immortality* ode, it can easily be justified by a short analysis, and if further argument is needed, one may appeal to the criticism of Coleridge, and more particularly of Arnold, who found it 'declamatory.' It is pointed out that Wordsworth writes best when he is not writing consciously to a theory, and the review concludes:

> 'When we look at these and many still finer passages in the writings of this author, it is impossible not to feel a mixture of indignation and compassion at that strange infatuation which has bound him up from the fair exercise of his talents, and withheld from the public the many excellent productions that would otherwise have taken the place of the trash before us.'

The review was at least an attempt to discriminate among Wordsworth's mixed output. Jeffrey's opening sentence on *The Excursion* (Nov., 1814) is known to everyone, but, apart from

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the fact that no important critic has ever attempted to defend the poem as a whole from the charges of ' interminable dullness and mellifluous extravagance,' it is not often realized that this review contains a good deal of praise and several long extracts to illustrate Wordsworth's peculiar merits. On Book I he says:

> ' We must say, that there is very considerable pathos in the telling of this simple story ; and that they who can get over the repugnance excited by the triteness of its incidents, and the lowness of its objects, will not fail to be struck with the author's knowledge of the human heart, and the power of stirring up its deepest and gentlest sympathies.'

and elsewhere, referring to the passages he had quoted with approval:

> ' When we look back to them, indeed, and to the other passages which we have now extracted, we feel half inclined to rescind the severe sentence which we passed on the work at the beginning ; but when we look into the work itself, we perceive that it cannot be rescinded. Nobody can be more disposed to do justice to the great powers of Mr. Wordsworth than we are ; and, from the first time that he came before us, down to the present moment, we have uniformly testified in their favour, and assigned indeed our high sense of their value as the chief ground of the bitterness with which we resented their perversion.'

There was every excuse, too, for Jeffrey's witty destruction of *The White Doe of Rylstone* (Oct., 1815). The story, it is said, would have made ' a pretty subject for a ballad; and in the author's better day, might have made a lyrical one of considerable interest.' The article on Wordsworth in the February number, 1822, is a severe but just account of his later work:

> ' Since he has openly taken to the office of publican, and exchanged the company of leech-gatherers for that of tax-gatherers, he has fallen into a way of writing which is equally distasteful to his old friends and old monitors—a sort of prosy, solemn, obscure, feeble kind of mouthing—sadly garnished with shreds of phrases from Milton and the Bible—but without nature and without passion—and with a plentiful lack of meaning, compensated only by a large allowance of affectation and egotism.'

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Unfortunately the reviewer makes the bad blunder of including the Duddon sonnets in this condemnation.

The first review of Wordsworth in the *Quarterly* was Lamb's article on the *Excursion*, not very interesting except as evidence that Wordsworth's reputation was now fairly well established. Gifford's article on the *White Doe* and *Poems* (Oct., 1815) begins with a generous tribute to Wordsworth's powers, but complains that ' he has by no means turned these valuable endowments to their greatest advantage.' He answers the arguments of the Preface that the passions are more easily observed in rustic life by pointing out that poetry is not the same thing as ' metaphysical ' (*i.e.* psychological) analysis, and that

> ' As in every other production of the human intellect, so in poetry: the superior pleasure which one subject affords rather than another is mainly ascribable to the comparative degree of mental power which they may require.

The reasons he assigns for Wordsworth's bathetic lapses are interesting: he criticizes the exclusive concern of the Romantics with their own feelings, and objects to the description of this kind of ' exuberant sensibility ' as specifically ' poetic,' apart from ordinary human sensibility, and says that it is not the intensity of the poet's own feelings which matters, but his power of evoking feelings in others. He repeats the warning against the affectation of a ballad style which ' can never be natural to a man like Mr. Wordsworth,' and notes that simplicity of language may often be purchased at the expense of perspicuity. The whole review is a particularly intelligent and temperate piece of criticism. Coleridge's *Remorse* was made the excuse for a general discussion of the methods of the Lake Poets (April, 1814). The reviewer notes that they work by evoking associations rather than by statement, but that they also go in for analysis of the minutest emotions,

> ' preferring, indeed, from the greater skill required in the task to trace to their causes the slight and transient rather than the strong and permanent feelings of the mind.'

This leads to the actual cultivation of emotions arising from slight causes, and hence to distortion of values, and to a self-consciousness which makes the emotions of these poets often appear strained and

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fictitious. *Blackwood's* accepted the Lake Poets from the first, and its condemnation of the *Edinburgh's* strictures is only one sign of its more Romantic tendencies ; even the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* were made the pretext for a general eulogy of Wordsworth—' indisputably the most original poet of the age,' and one to whom all contemporary poets were indebted. The *Noctes Ambrosianae*, which so often act as a kind of safety-valve for conversational outspokenness, and consequently contain much interesting criticism, yield some comments in a different tone, as when the Shepherd says (Oct., 1823):

> ' Yon lakers . . . Great yegotists ; and Wordsworth the worst o' ye a' ; for he'll alloo nae merit to ony leeving creatur but himsel'. He's a triflin' cretur in yon Excursion ; there's some bonny spats here and there, but nae reader can thole aboon a dozen pages o't at a screed, without whumming ower on his seat. Wudsworth will never be popular. Naebody can get his blank poems off by heart ; they're ower wordy and ower windy, take my word for't. Shackspear will sae as muckle in four lines as Wudsworth will sae in forty.'

The general essay in December, 1818, probably by Wilson, *On the Habits of Thought inculcated by Wordsworth*, is altogether a very intelligent and discriminating appreciation of his work, and it contains some interesting comments on what Arnold was to call ' Wordsworth's healing power ': Wilson quotes the last few lines of Book I of the *Excursion*, referring to ' the relation which the consideration of moral pain or deformity bears to this far-extended sympathy with the universe,' and comments:

> ' Notions like those of Mr. Wordsworth are evidently suited only to a life purely contemplative ; but that universality of spirit, which becomes true philosophy, should forbid, in persons of different habits, any blind or sudden condemnation of them.'

It has long been the fashion to marvel at the obtuseness of the Reviewers when confronted with the productions of the new school in poetry, but it is very much to be doubted whether any modern poet could count on receiving from the current literary periodicals reviews, however laudatory in tone, which would show more genuine appreciation and understanding of his aims than was

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shown by contemporary critics of Wordsworth. Even when the Reviewers were frankly unsympathetic, like Jeffrey, their strictures were based on recognized principles, and they showed more real discernment and discrimination than most critics writing to-day in the little-read highbrow journals, let alone periodicals of the same circulation and influence.

III,

The other Romantics were criticized from the same more or less eighteenth-century standpoint. Jeffrey's review of the *Reliques of Burns* (Edinburgh, Jan., 1809) has an excellent diagnosis of the Romantic idea of the artistic temperament—' the dispensing power of genius and social feeling in all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays and the lowest of our town-made novels . . . It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error.' The same essay emphasizes Burns' debt to a rural culture and points out that he was using a living language with a poetic tradition. Scott's review of the same book in the first number of the *Quarterly* regrets that the author's fastidiousness has led him to omit such poems as *The Jolly Beggars* and *Holy Willie's Prayer*. He remarks on Burns' power of uniting the ludicrous and the macabre, and points out that his satirical power declined immediately he tackled general subjects not connected with his own immediate observation. In the case of Scott's own poems, the Reviewers mostly agreed with the enthusiastic popular verdict, but their praise was usually discriminating, and Jeffrey's famous review of *Marmion* (1808) struck at the whole cult of mediævalism:

> ' We must remind our readers that we never entertained much partiality for this sort of composition . . . To write a modern romance of chivalry seems to be much such a fantasy as to build a modern abbey, or an English pagoda.'

The *Quarterly* reviewer of *The Lord of the Isles* (July, 1815) discusses Scott's great popularity and its significance:

> ' Whether this is a sort of merit which indicates great and uncommon talents, may perhaps admit a doubt ; but at all events it is a very useful one to the public at large.'

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Scott is said to write mainly with a view to pleasing, and is censured for carelessness, in

> ' not bestowing upon his publications that common degree of labour and meditation which, we cannot help saying, it is scarcely decorous to withhold . . . '

Much of the criticism of Byron was fairly favourable, but the Reviewers usually objected to his misanthropy and Romantic Satanism (' the searching of dark bosoms '). The *Edinburgh* review of *Childe Harold*, Canto IV (June, 1818) compares him with Rousseau, and censures his egotism:

> ' Posterity may make fewer allowances for much in himself and in his writings than his contemporaries are willing to do ; nor will they, with the same impetuous zeal, follow the wild voice that too often leads into a haunted wilderness of doubt and darkness . . . But they will not, like us, be withheld from sterner and severer feelings.'

The following remarks from the same review foreshadow Matthew Arnold's criticisms of the Romantics:

> ' But highly as we estimate these merits of our modern poetry, it is certain, that the age has not yet produced any one great epic or tragic performance. Vivid and just delineations of passion there are in abundance, but of moments of passion—fragments of representation.'

The *Quarterly* took up much the same position. Scott's review of *Childe Harold*, Canto III (Oct., 1816) is very favourable, and contains the sentence quoted by Arnold which describes Byron as ' managing his pen with the careless and negligent ease of a man of quality ' ; but in April, 1818, he said of the fourth Canto:

> ' His poetry is like the oratory which hurries the hearers along without permitting them to pause on its solecisms or singularities.'

and although he praised the poem highly he declared that the chief reasons for Byron's great popularity were, first, the novelty of this exposure of a personality, and secondly, the Byronic melancholy, which, he insists, is only curable in healthy relations

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with one's fellows. There is a reference here to ' bad metaphysics and worse politics,' but it was *Don Juan* which provoked the moral outbursts both in the *Quarterly* and in *Blackwood's*. The latter, however, after the first scandalized note, acknowledged the merits of the poem:

> ' That (laying all its manifold and grievous offences for a moment out of our view) it is by far the most admirable specimen of the mixture of ease, strength, gayety and seriousness extant in the whole body of English poetry, is a proposition to which . . . very few of them will refuse their assent.'

The controversy over *Don Juan* continued for years in *Blackwood's* but on the whole the poem was adequately defended. The question of its morality was taken up by ' Odoherty ' in September, 1823:

> ' Who . . . can honestly hesitate to admit that *Don Juan* is a great work, a work that must last? I cannot . . . Is it more obscene than *Tom Jones*?—Is it more blasphemous than Voltaire's novels? In point of fact, it is not within fifty miles of either of them: and as to obscenity, there is more of that in the pious Richardson's pious *Pamela*, than in all the novels and poems that have been written since.'

The Cockney School was not attacked with the same animus in the *Edinburgh* as in the Tory reviews, but the essential criticisms were made nevertheless. Jeffrey's praise of Hunt's *Rimini* was tempered by objections to the poem's vulgarity (June, 1816). Hazlitt's criticism was described as lacking any ' leading principles of taste,' and as containing many inconsistencies and affected paradoxes (Nov., 1820 and March, 1825). Keats was not reviewed until August, 1820, and then received a very favourable notice from Jeffrey in which generous praise is qualified by comments on the ' waste fertility ' of the early work and *Endymion*—which is nevertheless ' as full of genius as absurdity '—and on the typical extravagances of immaturity. Shelley was not noticed until the article on his posthumous poems (July, 1814), which contains some shrewd criticisms of his style:

> ' Mr. Shelley's style is to poetry what astrology is to natural science—a passionate dream, a striving after fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions—a fever of the

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> soul . . . associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects.'

The review speaks of 'the disjointedness of the materials, the incongruous metaphors and violent transitions'; and remarks that much Romantic poetry seems to have no purpose except that of giving vent to some morbid feeling of the moment.

From the *Quarterly*, of course, the Cockneys met with short shrift, whether on the score of morals, politics or literature. The literary criticism is severe, but full of sound sense: Hunt's vulgarity was fair game, and the reviewer of *Rimini* can hardly be accused of undue prejudice. He attacks the sloppiness of Hunt's loose couplets, his coined adjectives, and his sickly sensuousness; but allows some merits:

> 'After these extracts we have but one word to say of Mr. Hunt's poetry; which is, that amidst all his vanity, ignorance and coarseness, there are here and there some well-executed descriptions, and occasionally a line of which the sense and expression are good.'

The article on Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (May, 1818) objects to his criticisms of Johnson, his use of slang, his misquotations, and his self-contradictions. 'Hamlet,' says the reviewer, 'is introduced to us in the dashing style of a showman at a fair—Walk in, ladies and gentleman—"This is Hamlet the Dane, etc."' The review of *Lectures on the English Poets* (Dec., 1819) attacks chiefly the looseness of his reasoning:

> 'Mr. Hazlitt prefers appearing chiefly in the character of a philosophical reasoner. In this choice he is unfortunate; for his mode of thinking, or rather, of using words, is singularly unphilosophical. Some vague half-formed notion seems to be floating before his mind; instead of seizing the notion itself, he lays hold of a metaphor, or of an idea connected with it by slight associations: this he expresses; but after he has expressed it, he finds that he has not conveyed his meaning; another metaphor is therefore thrown out, the same course is trodden over and over again, and half a dozen combinations of phrases are used in vague endeavours to express what ought to have been said directly and concisely in one.'

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The reviewer goes on to give multiple definitions of Hazlitt's use of the word 'poetry':

> 'He employs the term "poetry" in three distinct meanings, and his *légerdemain* consists in substituting one of these for the other.'

Other reviews attacked his vilification of Pope, and his egotism and vulgarity. The *Quarterly's* review of Keats (probably by Croker, April, 1818) has acquired an undeserved notoriety, and should not be confused with the less defensible attacks of *Blackwood's*. It is severe, but it gives reasonable arguments to support its objections, and acknowledges that the author has talent:

> 'It is not that Mr. Keats (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody), it is not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy and gleams of genius—he has all these; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language.'

The censure of his loose versification, his word-coinages, and his 'immeasurable game at bouts-rimés; is entirely just. In fact, the only apology needed for the article seems to be that made by the reviewer himself:

> 'Mr. Keats, however, deprecates criticism on this 'immature and feverish work' in terms which are themselves sufficiently feverish; and we confess that we should have abstained from inflicting upon him any of the tortures of the "fierce hell" of criticism which terrify his imagination, if he had not begged to be spared in order that he might write more; if we had not observed in him a certain degree of talent which deserves to be put in the right way, or which, at least, ought to be warned of the wrong; and if, finally, he had not told us that he is of an age and temper which imperiously require mental discipline.'

The *Quarterly's* criticism of Shelley, as one might expect, was largely concerned with his doctrines, but the more strictly literary

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comments are often extremely shrewd and pertinent. The reviewer of the *Prometheus Unbound* volume said:

> 'We should compare the poems contained in this volume to the visions of gay colours mingled with darkness, which often in our childhood, when we shut our eyes, seem to revolve at an immense distance around us. In Mr. Shelley's poetry, all is brilliance, vacuity and confusion. We are dazzled by the multitude of words which sound as if they denoted something very grand or splendid; fragments of images pass in crowds before us; but when the procession has gone by and the tumult of it is over, not a trace of it remains upon the memory . . . The predominating characteristic of Mr. Shelley's poetry, however, is its frequent and total want of meaning. Far be it from us to call for strict reasoning, or the precision of logical deductions, in poetry; but we have a right to demand clear, distinct conceptions.

Shelley's practice of hurrying the reader past unrealized images by sheer rhythmic momentum, and his way of becoming more interested in the metaphor than the object it describes, did not pass unnoticed:

> 'His poetry is in general a mere jumble of words and heterogeneous ideas, connected by slight and accidental associations, among which it is impossible to distinguish the principal object from the accessory.'

The song of the Spirits of the Human Mind in *Prometheus* receives the fair comment: 'Sometimes to the charms of nonsense those of doggrel are added.' The whole review is a reasoned criticism from a point of view not far from that of Arnold's later article.

The most virulent attacks on the Cockneys came from *Blackwood's*, and even when all allowance has been made for the pretentiousness and vulgarity of the Hunt circle, there remains a good deal in these articles which cannot be excused. Apart from Lockhart and Wilson's irresponsible pleasure in extravagant abuse, there seems to have been a considerable amount of snobbery, as well as political feeling, in their attacks. But both sides indulged in mud-slinging to some extent, and Hazlitt's replies to Gifford were pretty thorough pieces of invective. Usually the actual criticisms

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were supported by reasonable argument: it was chiefly the tone which was so offensive. The first article on the Cockney School (Oct., 1817) is typical. The author, probably Lockhart, begins by describing the school and its leader:

> 'Its chief Doctor and Professor is Mr. Leigh Hunt, a man certainly of some talents, of extravagant pretensions both in wit, poetry and politics, and withal of exquisitely bad taste, and extremely vulgar modes of thinking and manners in all respects.'

Rimini reminds him of

> 'the gilded drawing room of a little boarding-school mistress . . . The company are entertained with lukewarm negus and the sound of a paltry pianoforte . . . His muse talks indelicately like a tea-sipping milliner-girl . . . For the person who writes *Rimini* to admire the *Excursion* is just as impossible as it would be for a Chinese polisher of cherry-stones, or gilder of tea-cups, to burst into tears at the sight of the Theseus, or the Torso.'

He proceeds to attack Hunt's morals, and comments on his social position:

> 'All the great men of our country have been men of some rank in society, and there is no vulgarity in any of their writings; but Mr. Hunt cannot utter a dedication or even a note, without betraying the *Shibboleth* of low birth and low habits.'

Hazlitt was at first received favourably by *Blackwood's*: his lectures were reported from London, and there was a long comparison of his criticism with that of Jeffrey (June, 1818); but he was soon coupled with Hunt and made to share the abuse heaped on the school in general. Sometimes the attacks are very witty, and often the criticism is sound enough, if it had only been made more objectively and with less venom. A pertinent comment on Hunt's *Indicator* essays occurs in *Wastle's Diary* in the September number, 1820:

> 'Only think of a sensible man, about the year 1920, reading a dissertation, by a little vulgar Sunday-paper-witling of 1820, on the propriety of calling children by *fine* names.'

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It does not seem to have occurred to the writer that the twentieth century would be reading and applauding dissertations on even more trivial subjects by a yet smaller breed of Sunday-paper-witlings. The abuse of Keats in *Blackwood's* is sufficiently notorious, and a comparison of Croker's *Quarterly* article, cited above, with the fourth article on the Cockney School (August, 1818) is at any rate enough to show that Croker's is merely legitimately severe criticism. Nevertheless, many of the criticisms here are fair enough:

> 'The nations are to listen and be dumb! and why, good Johnny Keats? because Leigh Hunt is the author of the Examiner, and Haydon has painted the Judgment of Solomon, and you and Cornelius Webb and a few more city sparks, are pleased to look upon yourselves as so many future Shakespeares and Miltons!'

The Hunt circle were indeed absurdly convinced of their own importance, and the following comment on their attitude to the eighteenth century was reasonable, if peevishly worded:

> 'It is most pitiably ridiculous to hear men, of whom their country will always have reason to be proud, reviled by uneducated and flimsy striplings, who are not capable of understanding either their merits or those of any other *men of power*.'

There were one or two subsequent half-apologies for the Keats article: *Wastle's Diary* for September, 1820, remarks:

> 'There is much merit in some of the stanzas of Mr. Keats' last volume, which I have just seen: no doubt he is a fine feeling lad—and I hope he will live to despise Leigh Hunt, and be a poet
>
> 'After the fashion of the elder men of England.'

Shelley, in spite of his 'perverted' morality—'a pestiferous mixture of blasphemy, sedition and sensuality'—was treated more leniently than the other Cockneys. The reviewer of *Prometheus Unbound* (Sept., 1820) indignantly denies that Shelley is more kindly treated because he is a gentleman; nevertheless the suspicion remains. But the review of *Adonais*, probably by Maginn (Dec., 1821) contains some sound criticism of his style:

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> ' The art of the modern Della Cruscan is thus to eject every epithet that he can conglomerate in his piracy through the Lexicon, and throw them out to settle as they will.'

The writer objects to the constant use of animism in *Adonais*, and shows, by one or two unkind parodies, how easy it is to do this kind of thing mechanically. He enumerates various passages which will not stand cool analysis, and quotes instances from *The Cenci* of sentimentality and sensationalism, remarking

> ' So much easier it is to rake together the vulgar vocabulary of rottenness and reptilism than to paint the workings of the mind.'

A note in the sixth *Noctes* (Dec., 1822) praises Shelley's translation of *Faust*—a fragment which seems to have met with general approval.

IV.

The chief count against the Reviewers is their tolerance of Moore, Campbell, Rogers and their followers in the line of elegant sentimentality. This typically Regency development forms a link between the minor eighteenth-century meditative and pastoral or didactic vein and the early Victorian album-poets, and usually consists of mild and insipid romanticism expressed in a dilapidated eighteenth-century poetic diction. The *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* both praised Rogers: the *Edinburgh* speaks of him as ' already a classic,' but the *Quarterly* is more cautious, and points out that he attempts nothing very ambitious. Jeffrey, writing on Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming* (April, 1809) rejoiced ' to see once more a polished and pathetic poem in the old English style of pathos and poetry,' and his insipid account of *Theodric* (Jan., 1825) called forth a taunt in *Blackwood's* about the ' Bairnly School of Criticism.' The same sort of taste appears sometimes in the reviews of Scott and Byron, and of course, Moore, but it is usually qualified by more detached criticisms (Moore's is 'a kind of cosmetic art—it is the poetry of the toilette,' and *Lalla Rookh* is 'too profuse of gems and sweets.'). The *Quarterly* was more discriminating about Campbell, and remarked that *Theodric* would strengthen the growing conviction of the public that ' the character of his

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mind is to be feeble and minute.' In common with *Blackwood's* and the *Edinburgh* it praised Mrs. Hemans highly. In *Blackwood's* these typically Regency poets met with a mixed reception. They were often praised, but *Theodric* was declared ' a fainter, dimmer, more attenuated Gertrude ' (Jan., 1825) and *The Ritter Bann* ridiculed ; while there are references to the ' schoolboy key on which Moore's love and heroism is always set ' (Jan., 1822) ; to the ridiculous air of gallantry in the ' irredeemably bad ' *Loves of the Angels* (Jan., 1823) ; and to the generally ephemeral nature of his work. In this connection it may be appropriate to consider Gifford's objections to Crabbe (*Quarterly*, Nov., 1810) that he is ' not a pleasing poet ' :

> ' The peculiarity of this author is that he wishes to discard everything like illusion from poetry. To talk of binding down poetry to dry representations of the world as it is, seems idle ; because it is precisely in order to escape from the world as it is, that we fly to poetry.'

In November, 1827, *Blackwood's*, too, was talking of Crabbe's ' cynicism,' but usually he was praised as an established classic: Jeffrey used him rather as a stick to beat Wordsworth. In general these foretastes of Victorian standards are exceptional in the Reviews: they remind the reader that the surviving eighteenth-century standards which were their chief strength were already entering upon that process of modification which led to the cultural decline of the latter part of the century.

Some of the same modifications of taste are apparent in the attitude of the Reviewers to older literature. Oddly enough, the *Edinburgh* shows nineteenth-century attitudes to the Augustans from the beginning, side by side with their opposites. Jeffrey's essay on Scott's edition of Swift (Sept., 1816) says straight out:

> ' We are of opinion, then, that the writers who adorned the beginning of the last century have been eclipsed by those of our own times.'

though it shows at the same time a very sound and discriminating appreciation of Swift's powers ; and the *Quarterly* article on Herrick and Carew (August, 1810) declares that ' the reign of Elizabeth, and not that of Anne, was without doubt the Augustan

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age of English poetry.' But there are constant defences of the eighteenth century in all the Reviews: Croker's article in the *Quarterly* on Spence's *Anecdotes of Pope* is a fair specimen. He protests against 'arbitrary standards and narrowing theories of art,' and concludes:

> 'In vain . . . would the populace of poets estrange themselves from Pope, and teach that he is deficient in imagination and passion, because, in early youth,
>
> He stoop'd to truth, and moralised his song.
>
> It is not the shadows of the imagination and the spectres of the passions only which are concerned in our poetic pleasures.'

Even in *Blackwood's* we find the Shepherd, in the nineteenth *Noctes* (March, 1825) speaking of Pope's

> 'Yepistles about the passions, and sic like, in the whilk he goes baith deep and high, far deeper and higher baith than many a modern poet, who must needs be either in a diving bell or a balloon.'

The general criticisms of the Romantics are often very close to those of Arnold later in the century. The *Edinburgh's* review of Chandos Leigh's *Poems* (March, 1821) objected pertinently that modern poets had no idea of the value of compression. The following extract from an article in *Blackwood's* called *Miscellanea Critica No. 1* (Sept., 1826) is typical of several other pronouncements on the same subject:

> 'May it not . . . be remarked specifically as characterizing the poetical spirit of our day that it is rather lively in feeling than intellectually steadfast or profound?—And do we not by the overflowing abundance of our verse—every spirit, almost that is ever so lightly touched by this concord of sweet sounds, breaking forth into numbers, as the pleasure were the impulse—increase this vivacity and movableness of feeling, withdrawing ourselves from the earnest and sometimes painful depth of thought—and from that depth, too, of feeling, which is not, save where thought is deep?'

The article *On the Drama* (April, 1822) in the same magazine objects to Romantic egotism:

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> 'We lament to see men forever fishing in their little selves, and angling, as it were, for gudgeons in a pool . . . We earnestly entreat the poets of the day to keep their stomachs to themselves for the future, and not to be so confoundedly communicative as to disgust us every now and then with a view of their very entrails. It is butchery, not poetry.'

Remarks of this kind show a detachment and insight which it would be very difficult to parallel in modern reviewing.

In the second part of this article[1] I hope to illustrate the criticism of fiction and drama in the Reviews, their attitude to the theory of criticism and to the question of art and morality, and the general seriousness with which they took their position as arbiters of public taste. But the above examples of their dealings with poetry in general, and the Romantics in particular, are a sufficient indication, I think, of the shrewdness and penetration which they brought to bear on the business of criticism. All their best work shows a sense of responsibility, a consciousness of performing a necessary and valuable function, a concern for the maintenance of the highest standards of thought and feeling, which are completely lacking in modern reviewing. The *Edinburgh's* motto—*Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*—represents a vigilant critical morality unknown to an age so innocent of standards as our own. It has been shown that they were by no means entirely unsympathetic to the new school of poetry, and even at their most brutal they at least provided a strong body of recognized and established opinion against which the new writers could react. This in itself is not so entirely negative as it might appear at first sight ; at any rate, it is probable that it is not the smallest of the handicaps of the modern poet that he cannot even count on an intelligent opposition. At their best, the Great Reviews provided far more than that: they produced, in fact, criticism of the general tendencies and the particular writers of their age which is often better than anything else on the same subjects throughout the century that followed.

R. G. Cox.

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[1]To appear in the September number of *Scrutiny*.

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OTHELLO AND THE MANGOLD-WURZELS

(ANDRZEJ STAWAR, a self-educated writer, was born at Warsaw in 1900, the son of a working-man. His literary work began in 1924 with sociological and historical essays, and literary criticism. He has published articles on Marxism and art in 'left' literary journals, one of which, till its suppression, he edited. He has been in prison for his journalistic activities.—J. Needham).

IN one of the novels of Ehrenburg[1] there is a description of a play given by a travelling company at a collective farm in Northern Russia. *Othello* was to be played, and the actress who was to take the part of Desdemona (the only reflective person present) felt that it was rather absurd. The collective farm had its usual anxieties ; the cows were only giving half the amount of milk expected, the ploughing was backward, the fields of mangold-wurzels, or whatever it was, were covered with weeds and badly hoed. In the company's repertory there were Soviet plays, but nevertheless the provincial actor manager wanted to strut and gesticulate in the role of the jealous Moor, and nothing else mattered. The play began by being misunderstood and ended amidst great general emotion among tears and rapturous applause. The peasants of the collective farm were especially affected by Desdemona, but after the performance was over they made her cry because, instead of congratulating her on her acting, they made all kinds of unexpected promises about the augmentation of the milk-yield and the better hoeing of the mangold-wurzels.

This description, which bears every sign of authenticity, comes to mind when one reads different and mutually contradictory accounts of the part played by literature and art in Soviet Russia. Arguments both favourable and unfavourable to Russia have become banal ; it is not necessary to repeat them. They generally contain too large a dose of subjectivism. Now although it may

[1] *Sans Répit*, by Ilya Ehrenburg.

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seem strange, the analysis of the state of affairs in a post-revolutionary society is perhaps most clearly approached not by taking opinions about the position of contemporary art or literature (because even enthusiasts clash here in spite of the best will in the world), nor by applying inapplicable analogies, but by considering the situation of literature in general.

Marxists who concerned themselves with the problem before the existence of the U.S.S.R., like Plekhanov,[1] mostly thought that in a future society, art would take the place of religion in its social functions. Transported by this idea, Plekhanov wrote much which we can only regard as an æsthetic scholasticism, but all the same the idea had much to be said for it. In speaking of such a replacement, we must not seek for functional continuities, such as some sort of secular rites would be. The cruder magico-administrative function of the clergy must be distinguished from the administration of the soul, brought through many centuries to a fine art. The replacement is not new in Europe ; it has already a long history, connected with the great intellectual transformations begun at the Renaissance. These are usually described as consisting of the development and popularization of the natural sciences, and the fusion of philosophical systems on a naturalistic basis. Of course it is true that the discussion of general concepts, the exclusion of supernatural intervention, the elimination of prejudged ethical norms, and their transference to a purely human realm, the theoretical primacy of investigative thought instead of mystical contemplation of a revealed truth—all this has played an essential rôle. But the parallel rôle of art and literature has not often been so well understood. Sometimes there have been struggles against the rational current (as in romanticism), but if we look at these phenomena broadly, we find that in the process of secularization which permeated enormous sections of the middle class during the Sturm and Drang period, the rôle of literature was not less than that of science, only it acted on another terrain.

Much has been written of the rough and fine adjustments of the ' administration of the soul ' carried out by religion. In all

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[1] *Problèmes fondamentaux de Marxisme* and in *Lettres sans Adresses*. Lenin also held similar views ; see *Lenin and Art* (in Russ.), Wri. Pub. Ho. Leningrad, 1934.

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religious systems, from the simplest to the most complex, this function may be divided into two parts. The first is the magical method (rain-making, devil-chasing, enemy-hunting, and the assurance of a happy life after death). But the more complex the social structure, the more the second method comes to the fore. This is the regulation and control of spiritual experience. It is a common property of men to wish to imitate those who claim to be able to show them how to live, especially if they speak as men having authority. With this goes the introspective examination of action and thought in order to use experience as a guide for the future avoidance of errors. For certain people the search for examples to imitate, and the desire to analyse one's actions, takes on the force of a passion. This is satisfied at the more refined levels of religious function.

If we consider mediæval man (and this is not a mere chronological concept, for we encounter many such types in the Polish countryside to-day), we find that the supernatural motives of the Church satisfy his psychological needs. Hagiography, the stories of the Gospels, the ceremonies of the liturgy, form a store of experience and regulate certain ideals of life, if not the whole entirety of life. Even the peasants whose examination of conscience made once a year at Easter constitutes the sole introspective factor in their lives, fall into this class. The lives of the saints are the only literature they know.

Set against this, the extraordinary influence of literature, especially psychological novels and psychological dramas, can be understood. Instead of an archaic, magical and mystical material, the new and vivid literature has all the weight of acquired experience. For these complexes of lived facts everyone can find analogies in his own life. A shock, a displacement of the centre of gravity, is brought about. As literature, however bad, spreads, the tendency to analyse psychological types spreads too. People acquire the habit of analysing their experiences, learning the technique from literature. Thus the novel becomes the great rival of hagiography and the strongest competitor of the confessional.

When we speak of the social rôle of literature, we usually tend to emphasize the social tendencies of the author himself. But authors with religious ideas contribute to the destruction of religious ideology just as much as atheistic authors. The opinions of Balzac

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or Dostoievski may appear poor or narrow ; this is no way diminishes the value of their work. For example, for many Poles, the heroes of the novels of Zeromski[1] concern them very intimately, not because they accept the author's socialist solutions of the problems he raised, but because of the living material incorporated in them. The struggle of influences, the opposition of contradictory concepts, the examination of cases of conscience, etc., clearly differentiate the world of to-day from the world as it was regulated by little doses of psychology from the mediæval clergy.

Thus the ' literization ' of the masses accompanies their secularization. The peculiarity of this process in Russia lies only in its scale. In traditional social orders, liberty of thought (and there was more, even in the middle ages, than used to be supposed) was a privilege of the governing class. This was often fully realized. Taine, in his description of pre-Revolutionary France, cites the opinions of an English intellectual, who was scandalized that his French friends did not hide their views before the servants and simple people. ' Scientific ' ideas were best reserved for those who knew what to do with them. To take away religion from the masses was regarded as inviting catastrophe. Hence the bourgeois psychology which, whether freethinker or atheist, preferred to have a religious wife and servants, appreciating the piety of simple people. To be above prejudices was for a gentleman a good quality, but worthy of condemnation in a mechanic. And the administration of the soul remained in the hands of the clergy.

These things have economic consequences and an influence on the social status of art. As far as literature is concerned one must agree that many circumstances often regarded as important are really not so ; for independent of the question whether Soviet literature is ' free ' or not, whether it produces masterpieces or not, whether the authors live well or badly, literature in the U.S.S.R. cannot fail to play a part relatively more important than anywhere else precisely because of the social transformations which have taken place there.

If now we look at Soviet literature more closely, we see that there are two important problems, first, the nature of contemporary writing, and secondly the position accorded to traditional literary

[1]See esp. his book *Les Cendres*.

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works. The second is more important than the first, though the two can with difficulty be separated.

Even well-disposed critics show many misunderstandings of the present state of affairs. The hostile press has long since made a point of publishing fantastic ' news ' about cultural inconoclasm, which to the ignorant appeared logical enough, since revolutionaries, of course, must destroy. What was really striking was that in the ideological revision of literary history, the position of the old masters was most carefully protected. In capitalist societies we often see revisionist tendencies of another kind, efforts to expose or ' debunk ' older authors ; yet in Soviet criticism we have had nothing like this. The same holds good for the traditional relations between literary age and youth. The critic Percov[1] wrote ' the history of literature is an incessant struggle of tendencies, of controversies carried out not always very politely. In the nineteenth century the classicists and the romantics vilified each other, and so did the realists, modernists and futurists. In contrast to this Percov described the religious care with which the 'proletarian' authors dealt with the ' classics.' Why were these traditional hard knocks put an end to? The decisive part was played by the cult of learned specialisms, one among which was ' former literature,' this term including not only the dead classics, but also the works of the ' fellow-travellers,' bourgeois writers favourable to the revolution. This cult has become a tradition in itself, which, be it said, hinders Soviet literature more than all administrative decisions put together, all the more because it is largely based on illogical prejudice.

It has been objected, as by André Malraux,[2] that Soviet literature is hopelessly photographic, the slave of realism. How little truth there is in this objection can be seen at once by studying the school of ' industrial novelists ' of the U.S.S.R.[3] The contrasts

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[1]Essay by V. O. Percov, in *Literatura Fakta*, Moscow, 1926.

[2]In Report of Congress of Soviet Writers, 1934.

[3]*e.g. Driving Axle* by V. Ilyenkov (about a locomotive factory), *En Avant, le Temps !* by V. Kataev (about Magnetogorsk), *Energie* by F. Gladkov (about the Dniepnostroy dam), *Seconde journée by I. Ehrenburg* (about a Siberian iron-works), *L'Homme change de Peau* by B. Jasienski (about irrigation in Turkestan).

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between the personages are here symbolic. Cold villains such as have not been seen for many a long year appear in these pages, characters blacker than the blackest night ; and conversely ideal heroes, perfect in every respect. Stylization of character is pushed to its utter limit. The plots, too, are equally formal. The Soviet authors excuse themselves by pointing to the difficulty of mastering an entirely new set of environments ; but this is by no means the whole truth ; there is another complicating factor.

The peculiarity of Soviet novels is that they occupy themselves almost exclusively with a group of persons which has only just received a name—the ' eminent people of the Soviet State.' The new thing about this is the extent of this ' upper ten million.' Systematization of literature results from the fact that emphasis is laid on all the traits common to these advanced workers. One can make any objection to this literature, save that it is photographic. It is stylized by the absence of the ' simple man.' If a Soviet writer describes a factory interior, and if his hero is a workman, he will be studying to become an engineer, or will soon become an administrator. But a simple man, with no aspirations for social advancement, is just one of the crowd, a walking-on part. From the point of view of the present industrial situation, where there is a shortage of skilled workers, this stylization may be deemed advantageous. But the sign of a true industrial culture would be furnished, not by the worker who will soon be an engineer or an administrator tied to an office, but by the worker carrying out some specialized work calmly and well, content to remain a worker. The movement for social advancement is of course connected with a certain democratic liquidity.

The peasant milieu, on the other hand, is presented by Soviet writers in a very complex manner. A simple peasant is often individualized. This may find a partial explanation in the fact that the characterization and individualization of peasants has long been a tradition in literature. It is often said that the peasant milieu is coloured while the industrial milieu is grey, and that this is a difficulty for the writer. But if we look at older literature (*e.g.* Mickiewicz)[1] we find that the peasant has no personality at all. Nor can it be said that Brodzinski[2] failed to see the colour

[1] *e.g. Pan Thaddeus*, a peasant idyll.
[2] *Wiesaw*, another peasant idyll.

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of peasant life ; yet again his characters are only ciphers. Writers of the positivist and ' young Poland ' school[1] gave very individualized images, seizing with new technique for a new social need the traits which had escaped Mickiewicz and Brodzinski. In traditional literature the enlargement of the subject-matter, and the study of new social groups, were united with the elaboration of new methods and new techniques of writing.[2] Yet the Soviet authors work up their new material to the sound of the watchword ' learn from the old masters.' This is partly why they give so prominent a place to the social advancement of individuals. Missionaries of culture to the masses, lives of superior persons, histories of careers,[3] dramas of ambition, all this lends itself only too well to treatment by the old methods. The costumes are changed. The real facts are not photographed, far less painted creatively. Soviet literature goes in for archaising. It abounds in traditional tricks. Insistence on learning to write well is nothing to object to (though it will not suffice for the construction of a literature). Actually we must seek elsewhere the reason for this state of affairs, as we have already hinted. It exists in the exigencies of administering literature and the need to control its development by pre-established criteria. Stabilization of literature accompanies stabilization of life, and the two mutually reinforce each other.

Now in the Soviet Union there is an absence of literary criticism. Yet this was far from being the case in Old Russia. A current belief is that Soviet literature is not only non-traditional but saturated with politics. Yet in fact it is almost wholly non-political. Opponents may, of course, point out the great rôle played by political formulæ in literary works and in the appreciation of them. But what do we mean by political activity? The bare declaration of political watchwords does not constitute political activity. On the other hand, the struggle of opinions as such, or the bringing about of certain changes in the social consciousness,

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[1]A group of artists of all kinds at the beginning of the century.
[2]As, for example, the English ' New Country ' school of poets.
[3]The *Lives of the Engineers* by S. Smiles, would be quite in line with contemporary Soviet feeling, though the material rewards of their labours were in some cases excessive for a socialist society.

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is political activity. But Soviet literature contains very little of it. Criticism in the accepted sense is not the mere appreciation and establishment of literary values. Essentially it is a struggle of intellectual tendencies. It cannot be thought of as existing without the serious play of essay and review.

The disappearance of literary criticism did not happen at once. It had the same cause as the disappearance of serious political writing. The fighting literary groups were composed, like such groups everywhere else, of novelists, poets, and other writers. When these groups were dissolved, the practical writers suffered little, but the theoreticians suffered graver consequences for they shared the fate of the politicians. Some years ago there were violent struggles between the different tendencies, and characteristically enough, these groups all wanted æsthetic and literary legislation. That was the cause of their death. In this way ended R.A.P.P. (Association of Proletarian Writers), which from the start had had a very eclectic programme and a definite would-be administrative character. It led a struggle against the ' fellow-travellers.' The ' sacred truce ' which followed brought little or nothing more than an attentuation of social differences. Some years ago, it would never have occurred to anyone to consider Pilnyak,[1] Tolstoy,[2] Sholokhov[3] or Ehrenburg[4] as socialist writers. They were rightly considered as representing the democratic intellectuals. The tendency to the ' socialization ' of everything that happens in the U.S.S.R. brought about the absorption of these writers, but at the same time the last possibility of literary discussions and polemics ceased. Moreover, the disappearance of literary criticism, and the cult of descriptive literature, which sadden the representatives of the older generation, are accepted with great enthusiasm by the more mediocre authors. Together with the advice to copy the old masters, they act as a sort of insurance, and hold back the emergence of new forces. The resulting danger, not only for literary

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[1]Author of *The Volga flows into the Caspian* and *L'Armée nue.*

[2]Author of *La Route des Martyrs* and *Pierre le Grand.*

[3]Author of *Quiet flows the Don* and *La terre refrichée.*

[4]Author of *La vie et la mort de Nicolas Kourbov, La mort de Jeanne Ney, Europe et Cie.*, etc., etc.

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culture, but for the social situation, is not understood.[1] The fixation of a literary hierarchy is particularly to be deplored. It makes the position of essayists and reviewers impossible. Some time ago, a Siberian journal attacked Maxim Gorki. The suppression which followed involved not only the editorial staff but also the local authorities for not having kept a better eye on what was going on. Thus all who realize the low level of literary criticism are powerless.

The development of the historical novel,[2] and the novel dealing with remote peoples,[3] is emphasized by some. It is interesting to see that authors with the greatest ambitions choose this genre, and that they speak not without malice of the ' industrial writers ' who after a stay of a few weeks at Magnetogorsk come home and write an industrial novel, only to go next season to a collective farm for about as long, and afterwards write another. There can be no doubt that their books are bought and read in enormous editions, and that they have great influence on the minds of their readers.

The criticism of too ' photographic ' description and the criticism of too great schematization have something in common. What is offered as the social material has not been digested, and has only formal relations with reality. What is most characteristic in Soviet literature is a mobilization of literary orthodoxy which can sometimes inhibit young authors who offer new methods. In spite of many interesting and important works, Soviet literature is a kind of ' middleman,' clothing the facts of to-day in the literary dress of the past. Nowhere else does literary work pass so quickly into the realm of historical interest. This cannot be attributed only to the speed of socialist transformation ; it is inherent in the nature of the output itself.

But to return to *Othello*, the representative of older literature. The unexpectedness of the situation goes to demonstrate its

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[1] *cf.* the contention of J.N. in Cambridge Review, 1935, that the level of Russian science, especially biology, would have been a good deal higher than it is, had critical minds been encouraged as much as the mainly productive ones.

[2] *e.g.* J. Tynianov *La mort de Vasir Muchtar* and *Kuchla* (novels of the time of Pushkin), and A. Tolstoi *Peter the Great.*

[3] *e.g.* B. Pilnyak *Ivan Moskva* (about the primitive hunters of the Taiga).

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authenticity. These men and women of the collective farm, after having listened to the tragic history of the Moorish captain and the Venetian merchant's daughter, made solemn promises about the better hoeing of the mangold-wurzel fields. In the greenroom Desdemona weeps. Her forebodings have been realized. What can these people know of such emotions or of beauty in general? What absurdity to applaud without in the least understanding the author's intentions. If these depressing conclusions were rectified later, that is not the point. The paradoxical juxtaposition of ideas illustrates the theme better than any long arguments.

It must be admitted that the atmosphere of mournful revenge in this tragedy is something quite alien to any spectator of to-day. The motives of action provoke doubts. The only thing which brings them near to the modern spectator is the complex interlocking of these motives. This *rapprochement* may have various forms. In the case described not without subtlety by Ehrenburg, it was apparently Desdemona who effected the *rapprochement*. The collective farm workers witnessed with amazement the shouts and gesticulations of Othello, but what really moved them was Desdemona, whose part was played by a provincial actress, a woman of unfulfilled aspirations, persistent bad luck, and unsatisfied ambition. She had begun to act only after false starts in other professions, and in playing Desdemona, she portrayed not the Venetian girl, but simply any woman pursued by ill-luck, unsuccessful in life, the 'victim of grim fate.' Perhaps it was this that made the piece comprehensible, in spite of the exotic motif.

In *Othello* there was nothing which could come into any direct relation with the dairy or work in the fields. At first sight the promises made by the peasants after the play may appear inadequate and due to unknown causes, but is it really so? If one speaks of the distance between the Shakespearean personages and the problems of to-day, one must nevertheless admit that they remain close to us. Is it the complexity of human relations, moral tension, or the working of fate? There is something there which provokes a specific shock, known not only to theoreticians, but also to readers, spectators, or, as one might say, receivers. According to the conditions, the moral reaction will take different forms. It may consist at one time in holding up something that

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is falling down ; at another time it may help to give a blow to something that is falling. Contemplation of the complexities in human affairs concentrated on the few square feet of the stage for a few hours, heroism and rage, bad fortune, bad choices, maladaptation, interdigitation of truth and error, proud stoicism, the deflation of pretensions, or the almost conscious preparation of the characters' own catastrophes—all this provokes a series of reflections which indirectly suggest the amelioration of the spectators' lives. The aspect taken by this cathartic discharge will depend on the life of the individual or the collective. Hence the promises of the collective farm workers. The factors which conduct this conscious shock are at once simple and complicated, depending on the point of view taken. If a reaction of this kind seems a little savage to, say, a hereditary intellectual, one must not forget that the manual worker has relatively little power of accumulating emotions ; they are immediately discharged in some form of action.

To sum up, the objective fact about the U.S.S.R. is that the intellectual activation of the masses on a scale never before attempted is closely connected with the secularization of daily life which takes on a special and vital importance. Much of the peculiarity of the present state of affairs is due to the need for mobilizing as quickly as possible the cultural goods of the past. The bourgeois literature of the past is doing once over again the work it did long ago in the upper layers of bourgeois society. Yet there is also the problem of the formation of a new literature in the new society. It is a question of the reciprocal relations of old bottles and new wine, and only the future will settle it.

A. STAWAR.
(Translated by J.N. and L.L.)

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THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM IN G. M. HOPKINS

THE chief problem presented by the poetry of Hopkins derives from the repressed conflict between two sets of values—those of the poet and those of the priest ; between the psychic individuality, or what I shall for convenience call the *personality* on the one hand, and the *character*, as determined by a strict regulative principle (the Jesuit discipline) on the other. Hence the central problem to be discussed may be stated as follows: How far and in what manner was the personality of Hopkins the poet stultified, or assisted, by the character of Father Hopkins, S.J.?

It is by now common knowledge that Hopkins, on becoming a Jesuit, burnt most of his early poems and resolved to write no more except by the wish of his superiors. Fortunately that sanction was not withheld ; but the creative Hopkins was at all times, from 1868 till his death in 1889, profoundly influenced or even dominated by the devotional text-book of the Society of Jesus—the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. The basis of this ' manual of election ' is Self-abnegation, or rather (for the principle is really positive), the complete dedication of the Self to God and salvation, to a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. Right ' election ' in all crises of the soul entailed the renunciation of all attachments and pleasures which were not contributory to God's service and the soul's weal: ' Take, O Lord, and receive my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will.' Hopkins acquiesced; yet how idiosyncratic his gesture of renunciation could be we hear in

> O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet
> That want the yield of plushy sward . . .

and in

> What life half lifts the latch of,
> What hell stalks towards the snatch of
> Your offering, with dispatch, of!

By a rigorous method of daily self-scrutiny called ' the particular examen,' the priest searched his conscience for the

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impure motive, the intrusive Self ; it is therefore not surprising that a man so devout as Hopkins should carry the same moral scrupulosity into his poetry. We proceed to observe how the regulative principle affects the imagination, the highest conscious function of the personality.

Hopkins is continually examining the claims of what Keats called ' the principle of Beauty in all things.' To Keats, Beauty was single and good—it was Truth: to Hopkins it was two-fold—' mortal beauty ' and immortal (or supernatural) beauty, and its influence or ' instress ' was equivocal ; for Hopkins saw that beauty could be both an insidious lure to the lower levels of being and a constant admonition to the higher. It all depended upon the state of the receptive mind, the character. On the analogy of the sensitive soul's response to the transient beauty of this world, the Christian, by a definite motion of the will towards ' the highest spiritual poverty,' aspires to the immortal beauty of the supernatural world, union with God in the Beatific Vision. The necessary check put upon sensibility by the disciplined will is first stated in ' The Habit of Perfection.' The enjoyment of beauty is a sacrament, and the implied obligation is an act of sacrifice:

> Give beauty back . . . back to God.[1]

In a later poem, ' To what serves Mortal Beauty?' Hopkins faces the danger of over-indulgence, and asks:

> What do then? how meet beauty?

and the answer is an attempt to bridge the gap between the transient and the permanent, to reconcile the poet with his impulse of acceptance and the priest with his doctrine of ' detachment ':

> Merely meet it ; own
> Home-at-heart, heaven's sweet gift ; then leave, let that alone.
> Yea, wish that though, wish all, God's better beauty, grace.

Recognition of this fundamental belief helps us to understand those poems in which direct sensuous enjoyment of natural beauty leads up to a doctrinal, dogmatic, or quasi-mystical consummation —the spiritual exegesis of nature's parable: I mean the early

[1] *The Golden Echo.*

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nature sonnets, 'God's Grandeur,' 'The Starlight Night,' 'Spring,' etc. On the other hand, failure to grasp or to sympathize with the poet's metaphysic leads to misconceptions like the following:

> 'The sensuous insistency with which, in these sonnets, earth and air are claimed for Christ is to my sense taut and artificial, suggesting a profound emotional dislocation, with the ensuing desolation of 'Carrion Comfort' as its inevitable counterpart.'[1]

The last part is merely a euphemistic way of saying that Hopkins was a victim of self-deception, that the poet dragged in the name of Christ simply to mollify the conscience of the priest. To anyone who has no use for Christian Theism the Christ-symbol will almost certainly appear 'taut and artificial'; yet that is no reason for saying that the frequency of this symbol betokens a 'profound emotional dislocation' in a sincere believer like Hopkins. (Unless the 'Letters' and 'Notebooks' are grossly disingenuous, it is difficult to maintain now that Hopkins seriously questioned his faith). To a fellow-Theist, the Christ-symbol indicates rather a profound and spontaneous unification of the intellect and the senses, that mystical fusion of the Many and the One which is at the root of all great conversions to the religious attitude and mode of life. As we know from his remarks on Keats and Whitman, Hopkins was not satisfied with a poetry which rested in the senses and the emotions alone; he desired intellectual satisfaction as well—what another Jesuit describes as 'the unity and order and ultimate satisfaction of the intellect' which for him 'the grandeur of theism'[2] could alone provide. Theism dressed not only his 'days' but his thoughts about man and the universe 'to a dexterous and starlight order'; and the nature sonnets are evidence not of 'emotional dislocation' but of his discovery of a philosophy about which he could say, with confidence and joy, 'On this principle hang the heavens and the earth.'

To Hopkins nature was (in Milman's phrase) 'a sublime theophany.' In his own words:

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[1]Basil de Selincourt: *The Observer*, Jan. 20th, 1935.
[2]M. C. D'Arcy, S.J. *Mirage and Truth*, p. 89.

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> ' God's utterance of Himself in Himself is God the Word, outside Himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news, of God.'

Then follows a statement which is vital to a complete understanding of Hopkins's mind and poetry: ' Therefore its end, its purpose, its purport, its meaning, is God, and its life or work to name and praise Him.'[1] When he writes

> I walk, I lift up, I lift up heart, eyes
> Down all that glory in the heavens to glean our Saviour.

we hear not a suggestion of emotional dislocation but rather of peace and certainty—that ecstasy which Dr. Richards once said Hopkins failed to reach. To most people, it is true, Christ stands for an ideal (or Utopian) code of morals, and they would see no connection between a code of morals and a mystical vision of external nature: to them such an arbitrary connection might well be a token of self-deception, a symptom of neurosis. But the phenomenon cannot be explained away so easily ; for even in the earlier Wordsworth we find something like it. Speaking of the ' tranquil restoration ' of remembered, assimilated beauty, he says:

> feelings too
> Of unremembered pleasure: such perhaps
> As have no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good man's life,
> His little, nameless, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love.[2]

From this it is but a step to Hopkins's comment on a bluebell: ' By its beauty I know the beauty of Our Lord.'[3]

No one will deny that a profound emotional dislocation informs the later sonnets of despair ; but before dealing with this question we will examine a poem which, although variously interpreted by agnostics and Roman Catholics, evinces in its final effect a perfect fusion of the poetic personality and the religious character: I mean

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[1]Quoted by G. F. Lahey, S.J. *Life of G.M.H.*, p. 124.
[2]*Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey.*
[3]*Notebooks and Papers, Etc.* (Oxford), p. 134.

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' The Windhover.' The fact that Hopkins dedicated the sonnet ' To Christ our Lord ' suggests, first, that he saw in the kestrel, as in the bluebell and all things of beauty, a symbol of Christ ; and secondly, that he found a deep relief and self-justification in the writing of the poem. The resolution of spiritual conflicts, and the reconciliation of opposite or discordant tendencies in the active personality and the consciously controlled character is a process similar to that which Coleridge defines as the highest poetic imagination—' the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.'

In ' The Windhover ' the reconciliation is between the rival claims of this life and of the next ;[1] between the value and the danger of mortal beauty ; between the desire for freedom of expression—the natural function ' wild and self-instressed,' and ' the will to suffer, to subject oneself to the ascetic rule, to dedicate all one's powers to Christ's employment.' The resolution of the conflict depends upon recognition of the fact that ' mastery ' and ' achieve ' in those mental and physical acts which excite the admiration of onlookers (activities of personality) may be sublimated—assimilated by the character and revealed with equal or greater merit in the supreme act of sacrifice, which is derived from, due to, and rewarded by, Christ.

> ' Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume here
> Buckle! . . . '[2]

The wild beauty and instinctive self-discipline of the kestrel are symbols of the controlled beauty given ' back to God ' and the military self-discipline of the Ignatian ideal. The likeness between the bird and the partially repressed personality of the poet is obvious, and is emphasized rather than obscured by the subtle ambiguities in the poem: ' chevalier,' for instance, can with equal force refer to the kestrel, the poet's ' heart in hiding,' and Christ. The equally obvious difference is that Hopkins, as a Scotist,

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[1]' I am a eunuch—but it is for the kingdom of heaven's sake ' (*Letters to Bridges*, p. 270).

[2]Despite Mr. Empson's ingenious suggestions, the primary meaning of this word is that of Shakespeare's ' buckle thy distempered cause within the belt of rule.'

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believed his own self-discipline to be ultimately a function of the will, which was free to choose or to reject the Ignatian character. That it was the poet's intention to point this likeness-with-a-difference is proved by the phrase ' O my chevalier.' This is addressed ostensibly to the bird, but also, by the clear implication of what follows, to himself. Hopkins the poet was, when free to act, a curvetting and caracoling knight-errant ; but the mental transition from ' chevalier ' to ' chivalry,' and thence to ' soldier of Christ ' (the Jesuit priest) makes the next symbol of humble useful toil—the plough—both natural and moving. Because of the sacrifice, the fire that breaks from the plodding priest and inhibited poet is all the ' lovelier ' in the eyes of Christ and all the more ' dangerous ' to the powers of evil:

> No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
> Shine . . .

But the price must be paid. How unlike the swoop of a hawk is the following symbol of the jaded drudge, the slow decline into age or infirmity, the gradual cooling off of youthful zeal—' blue-bleak embers.' Yet the consolation is there:

> and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
> Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold vermilion.

—words which suggest, as Mr. Empson[1] says, both the martyr's blood and the crown of gold. They also foreshadow the ' terrible pathos ' and unique poetry of his later sonnets.

No doubt ' The Windhover ' expresses a great deal more of the poet's unconscious than he was himself aware. It is a poem essentially of the tragic order. To the Catholic reader, the sense of loss is diminished by the compensatory sense of moral gain, of the Self over-mastered. But the final impression for any reader must be one of catharsis, ' that sense of relief, of repose in the midst of stress, of balance and composure, given by Tragedy ; for there is no other way in which such impulses, once awakened, can be set at rest without suppression.'[2]

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[1] *Seven Types of Ambiguity.*

[2] I. A. Richards: *Principles of Literary Criticism*, Chap. xxxii, p. 246.

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The appeasement and resignation expressed in 'The Windhover' were not absolutely decisive. Yet up to 1885, when 'Carrion Comfort' was 'written in blood,' Hopkins's work cannot as a whole be called unhappy. Many of these poems—'Henry Purcell,' 'Brothers,' 'The Blessed Virgin,' etc., are as much the consummation of pure joy as any in the language. In 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves,' however, we hear harsh repercussions of the particular examen:

> Let life, waned, ah let life wind
> Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon all on two spools . . .
> . . . black, white: right, wrong;

There, no doubt, is the dislocation which Dr. Richards and Mr. de Selincourt have deplored—that the rich variety of such a poet's intellect, imagination and potential experience should be levelled down to this stern 'dichotomy of right and wrong.' Yet if we discount the moral aspect and consider only the poetry, can it truthfully be said that his cry 'O our tale, our oracle' is justified?—that the poet's dapple is really at an end?—that his valuable personality is quite steeped, pashed and dismembered in the larger unit of the Jesuit discipline? The answer is in the poem itself: diction, rhythm, imagery, organization of experience—all are new, individual.

An interesting pendant to 'The Windhover' is the sonnet 'In honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez' (1888). Despite its objective theme, it is, one feels, strongly subjective, and goes to prove that Hopkins's loyalty to the regulative principle had moulted no essential feather up to the year before his death. Like 'The Windhover,' the poem deals with the 'unseen war within the heroic breast' of the humble, plodding servant of Christ: and the note of triumph is unmistakable:

> Yet God that hews mountain and continent . . .
> *Could crowd career with conquest* while there went
> Those years and years by of world without event
> That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.[1]

As with King Lear, this projection of the self into another was a kind of relief. The hurtle of the poet's own 'fiercest fray' we

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hear in the sonnets Nos. 40, 41 and 45. Yet commentators on the so-called tragedy of Hopkins's whole life (Dr. Richards, for example) are so anxious to give full weight to these utterances that they ignore the psychological significance of first-rate poems of quite a different outlook. ' Harry Ploughman ' (1887) and the incomplete ' Epithalamion ' (1888) are both joyous products of the unimpeded personality. (There is no need to discover a pathological symptom in the violent physical action of the former or in the missing nuptial exegesis of the latter). Moreover to anyone who can entertain even only the smallest wistful hope of Immortality, ' That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire ' must surely present as perfect a collaboration of priest and poet as ' The Windhover.'[2]

How far the ill-health and depression so frequently mentioned in the ' Letters ' were due to thwarted physical impulses would be a dangerous matter for speculation by one who is not a trained neuropathologist. It is certain however that many of the later sonnets are concerned with the poet's struggle to live in accordance with the Ignatian rule. ' One step,' says a commentator on the *Exercises*, ' is patience and meekness under affronts.' Touching the former virtue Hopkins laments:

> Patience hard thing! the hard thing but to pray
> But bid for Patience is!

And that his ' elected silence,' whether as patriot, priest, poet or plain man could at times prove almost unbearably irksome we learn from No. 44. In this he may be uttering a repressed desire to write an ode to England, a political pamphlet, or perhaps merely to speak his mind freely to those about him. But to some ears the sestet vibrates with a deeper, more tragic note, which hints at something more personal and essential than a sporadic patriotism or what Dr. Richards somewhat curiously calls ' self-consciousness ':

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[1]The italics are mine.

[2]*cf.* ' Hopkins's best poem for me is 48 (the " Heraclitean Fire ") ; this has the fusion required by a " metaphysical " mind which had to work in harmony on two planes at once.' (Louis Macneice: *New Verse*, April, 1935).

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> Only what word
> Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling ban
> Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard unheard
> Heard unheeded leaves me a lonely began.'

No doubt Hopkins suffered greatly ; yet he had been prepared for periods of dejection and disillusion by the *Spiritual Exercises*, in which moods of desolation are minutely described and dogmatically accounted for. In the words of Father Keating, S.J.:

> 'Whatever experiences are reflected in the four or five "terrible sonnets," so full of spiritual "desolation," so expressive of "the dark night of the soul," that those close to Christ are at times privileged to pass through, they cannot have been due to a mere sense of failure and frustration, still less to doubt as to whether he had chosen aright.'[1]

We may cite in corroboration Hopkins's own words: 'I have never wavered in my vocation, but I have not lived up to it.'[2] And as for suffering, he had explicitly stated, in 1869, that suffering, nobly endured, was a mark of special grace:

> 'What suffering she had!. . . But sufferings falling on such a person as your sister was are to be looked on as the marks of God's particular love, and this is true the more exceptional they are.'[3]

Yet those who maintain that much of his trouble was due to unsatisfied creative impulses have no mean evidence to go on. There is first the significant passage in a letter, where he regrets his inability to carry out his literary projects—'it kills me to be time's eunuch and never to beget' ; and frustration could hardly be more articulate than in No. 50, from its cry

> Why do sinner's ways prosper? and why must
> Disappointment all I endeavour end?

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[1] *The Month*, July, 1935.
[2] Letter to Dixon: *Correspondence*, p. 88.
[3] *Letters to Robert Bridges*, p. 25. The same idea is expressed in *The Wreck of the Deutschland* (1875), Stanza 22.

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to the poignant repetition of

> . . . birds build—but not I build ; no, but strain,
> Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.

The mortification expressed here and in No. 44 is intensified in the acute anhedonia and spiritual dyspepsia of No. 45:

> I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
> Bitter would have me taste. My taste was me . . .
> Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours . . .

The active personality has not been perfectly assimilated by the passive religious character. ' Selfyeast of spirit ' suggests the individual vital principle, the psychic individuality, rather than the immortal soul of the Christian, which strives to annihilate the Self either in works of charity or in a perfect union with its Creator. The souring of the personality and the consequent loss of inspiration is a foretaste of perdition:

> I see
> The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
> As I am mine, their sweating selves ; but worse.

—the mere husks of men, without vision or hope. Contrast this with the Scotist ecstasy of No. 34—' Selves, goes itself ; *myself* it speaks and spells.'[1] Now ' What I do is me ' seems to have become ' What I cannot do is what I want to be.' The last two words of the poem, placed in emphatic isolation, must not be misread: they safeguard the priest's sincerity, for with a sudden twist the poet diverts our attention from himself to what without some saving grace he would become. As in ' Carrion Comfort,' having groaned ' I can no more ' he immediately cries ' I can.' Yet when he remonstrates with God, or attributes the bitter taste of himself to ' God's most deep decree ' (' baffling ban '), he seems to confess that the mortification he endures is very much more than the voluntary mortification of the patient ascetic. The complaint we hear seems to come from a personality which is

[1] *cf.* also: ' Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, selving, this selfbeing of my own.' (*Notebooks and Papers of G.M.H.*, p. 309).

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prevented by ill-health, overwork, or inhibition from reaching its full stature.

I think it probable that Father Keating has underestimated the agonies of failure and frustration which creative genius, without any religious complications, can undergo, and has ignored the neuroses which may be caused when powerful instincts and impulses are repressed or imperfectly satisfied. But this qualification does not, to my mind, altogether invalidate his belief in the supernatural origin and purpose of Hopkins's desolations. Such experiences have been regarded by many serious thinkers as a phenomenon worthy of consideration in any complete study of man. Admit the possibility and it follows that God's purpose with the spirit, as with the body, might well work itself out in ways which are clearly explainable in the light of psychology and physiology.

To sum up, whether the cry of anguish in the later sonnets was due to mutilation or to probation, the gain to poetry, on the whole, seems to me to outweigh the loss. Had Hopkins been physically stronger, less devout, less sensitive, less neurotic, we should have had more poems but not the ones we now treasure. His output was restricted but at the same time intensified—allotropized from graphite to diamond (Dixon's ' terrible crystal ') in the stringency of his ' bleak asceticism.' Being one of those described by William James as needing ' some austerity, wintry negativity, roughness and danger to be mixed in to produce the sense of an existence with character, texture and power,'[1] his moral fastidiousness, in union with his ritualistic sensualism, had valuable repercussions in the rigours and splendours of his poetic style. On the other hand, the religious life probably fostered that unsophisticated, intuitive approach to nature, life and language which, as Vico says, is an essential condition of the true ' original ' poet. So far from ' whirling dizzily in a spiritual vacuum,'[2] the personality of Hopkins found in its delimited experience a medium of considerable resistance through which it could at times beat up to heights unattempted before in English poetry.

W. H. GARDNER.

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[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 298.
[2] Mr. Middleton Murry: *Aspects of Literature*.

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CORIOLANUS

CORIOLANUS has never satisfied the critics. Most of them have felt that it stands in some way apart from the main body of Shakespeare's work ; they find it frigid, and they even tell us that Shakespeare's interest in it flagged. On the other hand, an important minority—including Mr. Eliot—have been considerably attracted by the play, and have even found an important place for it in the development of their own experience. The only point upon which there seems to be agreement is that *Coriolanus* is difficult, and that its artistic quality is peculiar. Even sympathetic critics must account for the fact that the figure of the hero is harsh and, at times, grotesque, whilst Aufidius' behaviour is puzzling and inconsistent. It is the task of a critical interpretation to show whether these contradictions are part of the stuff of the author's experience, or whether they are only the odds and ends left over by imperfect assimilation. On the common view it is quite clear that these facts cannot be accounted for, that they are a sign of serious failure. This paper proposes, by approaching the play through its verse and language, to show that these ' difficulties ' are part of Shakespeare's intention and result in an artistic success as assured as that of *Macbeth* ; I shall also try to define the nature of that success, and to assess its value as a kind of tragedy more new and interesting than many have realized.

The mastery displayed in the verse of *Coriolanus* does not suggest declining powers or lack of interest. There is an interesting example of this in the very first verse speech of the play, when Menenius rebukes the citizens for their mutterings:

> For your wants,
> Your suffering in this dearth, you may as well
> Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
> Against the Roman state ; whose course will on
> The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
> Of more strong link asunder than can ever
> Appear in your impediment. For the dearth,
> The gods, not the patricians, make it, and
> Your knees to them, not arms, must help.

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It is impossible not to feel that this is an example of the unique, free mastery of Shakespeare's later verse. We should be aware of the conciseness of the last sentence, of the way in which the ' not arms ' parenthesis enables us to grasp the essential contrast without the distraction that would result from a full statement of the alternatives ; it is a telescoping of language that follows the movement of living thought. More important for our purpose is the way in which the rhythm of the earlier lines serves to develop a nervous power in the words, expressing the irresistible motion of tremendous and insentient force. The essential lines are:

> . . . whose course will on
> The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
> Of more strong link asunder than can ever
> Appear in your impediment.

The force is, as usual, not only stated, but given concrete embodiment in the movement of the verse. The division of ' cracking ' and ' asunder,' both words which carry with them strong feelings of physical separation, serves to carry the reader over the intervening words so that his experience partakes of the irresistible movement of the Roman state. The emotional impetus thus created is then brought to a sudden curb by the ending of the sentence in the middle of the familiar blank verse unit of the line, an ending prepared for and emphasized by the strong, decisive Latin word ' impediment.' The movement of the verse, in fact, is that of a poet who is in complete mastery of his medium, which has become a pliant instrument to express the subtle movements of his consciousness. It is sufficient to suggest that *Coriolanus* is a great play.

I quoted the passage, however, less to establish Shakespeare's powers of versification in *Coriolanus*, than to introduce the issues with which it deals. The central feeling of the speech is clearly that suggested by the phrase, ' strike at the heaven with your staves,' and emphasized in the nervous strength of the passage we have discussed. To be certain of this, we may reinforce the impression of ' staves ' by referring to Menenius' talk of the citizens' ' bats and clubs ' just above, echoed once more by ' stiff bats and clubs ' in the course of the same argument. Mr. Wilson Knight, in *The Imperial Theme*, acutely pointed out that these

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phrases, together with others of the same kind, were sufficiently prominent to give a peculiar sensation of hardness and ruthless inpenetrability to the play. In other words, the sense of social stiffness and utter incompatibility is woven by Shakespeare into the emotional texture of his work, and gives a peculiar tone to the political and social study which underlies it. The ' bats and clubs ' of the contending parties strike at one another in a closed universe ; ' the heavens,' with all their associations of light and 'grace,' remain rigid and impenetrable, so that we can almost hear the ' stiff ' weapons clang when raised against them. This sense of hardness and hostility is essential to *Coriolanus*, for, as we shall see, it is repeated in the play's attitude to war and in the character of the hero himself. For the present, we shall merely note the vividness of Shakespeare's political study of Roman conditions, the sense of a social order hardened into insentience on the one hand and unworthiness on the other, the patricians and the people utterly out of contact with one another, hard, hostile, exclusive in their attitude. The patricians have no contact with the people ; Menenius' speech already quoted stresses their merciless lack of feeling and responsibility, and Coriolanus himself caricatures his warlike valour in the following speech:

> Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,
> And let me use my sword, I'ld make a quarry,
> With thousands of these quarter'd slaves, as high
> As I could pick my lance.

This perversion of the traditional speech of warlike heroes is a masterpiece of irony. On the other hand—and this everyone admits—the people are weak, worthless, and brutal, easily led astray by the scheming Tribunes, and quite incapable of seeing beyond the selfish ends of the moment.

All this is more or less apparent. Much more important is the image under which Shakespeare develops this discord, and gives it significance. The theme is actually a variation of that of ' degree,' so prominent in *Troilus and Cressida*, but here less ' metaphysically ' and more socially conceived. It is worth noting, however, that the verse of *Troilus*, even that given to Ulysses, is not equal to that of *Coriolanus* in the precision which denotes mastery of experience ; the comparative lack of organ-

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ization which accompanies the extraordinary complexity of the language in the earlier play indicates a mind overwhelmed by a superabundance of new conceptions—conceptions which will need to be worked out in the developing pattern of the tragedies. As in *Troilus*, however, the essential image which Shakespeare chose to give point to his study is that of the functioning of the human body. As usual, it appears almost at once in order to set clearly the tone of the play. Menenius develops it fully in his fable to the citizens:

> There was a time when all the body's members
> Rebell'd against the belly ; thus accused it:
> That only like a gulf it did remain
> I'the midst of the body, idle and unactive
> Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
> Like labour with the rest ; where the other instruments
> Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
> And, mutually participate, did minister
> Unto the appetite and affection common
> Of the whole body.

Now this speech, and the discussion which follows, are based on North's Plutarch, but they are there stated in the abstract manner of the moralist, occupying only a few lines and in no way suggesting the individuality of Shakespeare's version. Upon this basis, the poet created a fundamental criticism of Roman society—fundamental, precisely because it was not merely political, like so many of the fashionable accounts of the contemporary situation by Left-minded writers, but based upon a sensation of fine living developed through the whole pattern of the tragedies. I nearly sub-titled this essay as ' A study on Shakespearean politics,' but was deterred by dangerous associations of which one can hardly fail to be aware. I do suggest, however, that my attempted analysis of this play is an effort to show in what way Shakespeare is not only ' great,' but urgent and relevant, a reminder that the most needed criticism to-day is one based on an awareness of the possibilities of living, which exist, however obscured they may be by our depression. Keeping this aside in view, we may return to Menenius, and study the way in which Shakespeare has invested a political commonplace with his own sense of poetic significance.

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The first point to notice is one that precedes the formal development of the political situation ; it concerns the quality of feeling which Shakespeare has introduced into his verse. The prevailing tone is one of idleness, of stagnation, of a general obstruction of everything that suggests life and activity. We note before everything the unhealthy heaviness of ' idle and inactive,' and the direct coarseness implied by the vernacular of 'cupboarding.' Then we find this contrasted with the very noticeable livening of the verse when we come to speak of ' the other instruments,' the senses and active parts of the body. This balance of two contrasted elements, the keenness of the senses carrying with it a related feeling of physical repulsion and sluggishness, is already evident in the earlier plays. Here, too, Shakespeare connects this intensity of feeling with the contrasted baseness and satiation of lust. The feeling of the speech is given another subtle turn by the reference to ' the appetite and affection common ' ; ' appetite ' has behind it associations with ' the universal wolf ' of Ulysses' great speech, as well as with frequent Elizabethan references to incontinence ; the latter, of course, are further strengthened by the word ' common,' so often used by Shakespeare's contemporaries to indicate promiscuity. We have, then, a feeling, very like that of *Troilus*, of a social organism in disorder and decay, an impression further strengthened by the prominence given to the idea of food and the process of digestion. Greed and satiety are the main images by which we are prepared for the tragedy of *Coriolanus*.

So far, in substance if not in every detail, we have most of the critics with us. It is generally recognized that there are elements of disorder and decay in the Rome of Coriolanus. But there is also a feeling that the author's sympathies were with the patricians. This view, however, immediately lands us in the perplexities already indicated, on the strength of which the play has so often been condemned as a failure. If Coriolanus is really the ' hero,' and the patricians on the whole an admirable class, why is his behaviour so inconsistent, not to say degrading? A moment's consideration of this same speech will show us that the subtlety of Shakespeare's political analysis is much beyond that of his critics. For the patricians are presented to us in the likeness of the ' belly,' with the result that there is an essential contrast between their stagnation and their indispensability. Menenius

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makes a just criticism of the failure of the populace to play a proper part in the social organism ; but the figure he chooses to elaborate his point turns the argument against his own class. Though the belly was essential to the proper working of the body, it was also ' idle and inactive ' and self-satisfied ; in this connection we should note that brilliant stroke:

> With a kind of smile,
> Which ne'er came from the lungs, but even thus . . .

with its fine balance between the comic and the complacent. Shakespeare even goes further. He gives to the First Citizen some of the most bitter and penetrating words in the whole discussion. There is no hiding the force with which the ' cormorant belly ' and ' the sink o' the body ' cut through the complacent assumption of superiority recorded by Menenius. Lastly, we should not pass over Shakespeare's ambiguous attitude to the belly as distributor of food to the whole body ; if it gives life to the rest of the body, it is also the receptacle of the worthless bran.

The result of this speech, then, is a very subtle apprehension of the condition of a social organism, as revealed by the power of a living and penetrating sensibility. We are shown a populace incapable of discerning its own good, vicious and vulgar, and needing the leadership of a class superior to itself. On the other side, we are also shown a patrician class who have forfeited their right to superiority by showing a complete selfishness and lack of responsibility. They are, in fact, merely subsisting on a position gained in the more or less distant past. Both these factions are set in an iron social framework which permits no contact, no community of interests, nothing but repression on one side and animal discontent on the other. That is the full meaning of the inflexible quality of Menenius' first speech.

* * *

Having provided as a background such a subtle social study, Shakespeare was not likely to place in the foreground a hero whom he regarded as a simple and romantic warrior struck down by the worthless and ungrateful people. Even those who have tended to this view have always been baffled by the way in which Shakespeare stresses both Coriolanus' proud obstinacy and his unnatural

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lack of feeling for the whole setting of his past life. It is more hopeful to approach the hero through the feeling expressed in the war poetry of the play. The eulogy of him by Cominius at the Capitol gives us a suitable opportunity to do this:

> His pupil age
> Man-enter'd thus, he waxed like a sea ;
> And, in the brunt of seventeen battles since,
> He lurch'd all swords of the garland . . .
> . . . as weeds before
> A vessel under sail, so men obey'd,
> And fell below his stern: his sword, death's stamp,
> Where it did mark, it took ; from face to foot
> He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
> Was timed with dying cries: alone he enter'd
> The mortal gate of the city, which he painted
> With shunless destiny ; aidless came off,
> And with a sudden re-inforcement struck
> Corioli like a planet: now all's his:
> When, by and by, the din of war gan pierce
> His ready sense ; then straight his doubled spirit
> Re-quicken'd what in flesh was fatigate,
> And to the battle came he ; where he did
> Run reeking o'er the lives of men, as if
> 'T were a perpetual spoil ; and till we call'd
> Both field and city ours, he never stood
> To ease his breast with panting.

It is impossible not to feel at once, without any detailed discussion, that this is Shakespeare at his mature best ; who else would have used that bold compression ' man-enter'd,' in which explicitness is waived in favour of speed and immediacy of expression? The verse moves with the utmost ease and freedom, a perfectly plastic medium for catching shifts of feeling ; such a shift is recorded in the emphasized contrast between the splendour of ' he waxed like a sea,' reminiscent of *Antony and Cleopatra* in its suggestion of unbounded energy, and the leaden reality of ' lurch'd ' and ' brunt.' These things are conveyed easily to a reader who is prepared for them ; the voice is carried irresistibly by rhythms which are always based on living speech to the proper emphasis,

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the delicately felt pause by which Shakespeare so often converts the statement of a fact into its apprehension by the act of a completely sensitive response. The line:

> And with a sudden re-inforcement struck
> Corioli . . .

with its telling isolation of ' struck ' at the end of the line, is an outstanding example ; it produces the sense of weighty and fatal pressure which is so essential to the impression at which Shakespeare aimed.

So we come to the feeling of the speech. In it Shakespeare is using his unique capacity for compressing the complex feelings that underlie his exploration of a situation into the unity of a single speech, whose central images are conversely radiated out into the surrounding matter, of which they serve at once as a concentration and a point of departure. It is in this sense that the mature plays could be described as organic, the product of a sensibility whose life was not only diffused through a play, but was concentrated into every part of it. The speech gives us a peculiar impression of Coriolanus as a warrior. It stresses at once his vitality, his splendid and superabundant life, and his heaviness, his cruelty, almost his fantastic absurdity ; and the two are part of the same man. The first of these qualities is expressed not only in the rich, splendid image we have already noticed—' he waxed like a sea '—but it is also given a definite living quality, a fine nervous delicacy in:

> . . . the din of war gan pierce
> His ready sense ; then straight his doubled spirit
> Re-quickened what in flesh was fatigate . . .

This superb sensitive response to ' the din of war ' is not new in *Coriolanus*. We are carried at once back to Othello's reaction to ' the spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,' which gives the same impression of the senses at work at the confines of their intensity. War gives rise here to a fine keenness of feeling that is only paralleled by Shakespeare's reaction to love in *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is, indeed, worth remembering that the two plays were written at the same period, for we shall see that there is some association between their respective treatment of war and love.

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All this does not mean, of course, that Shakespeare was a crude and ignorant enthusiast for war. He had already, in his earlier period, made a complete study of the uncompromising, egoistic, patriot in *Henry V*, and the greatness of this speech in Coriolanus depends upon the manner in which there is intertwined with the sense of superb vitality a dead heaviness, which culminates in an almost grotesque insentience. That is the reason why the munificence of ' he waxed like a sea ' is immediately qualified by the ponderous impact of ' brunt ' and ' lurch'd.' It should be seen, further, that these lines are dealing with Coriolanus' growth into manhood. They suggest perfectly the double process which Shakespeare saw and conveyed in his verse in the history of the great soldier. On the one hand, Coriolanus grew into the full development of his powers, the complete expression of his maturity. On the other hand, his new power converted itself more and more, with success, into heaviness and indifference to vitality, into an exclusion of the very qualities of life and sensitivity which maturity should have crowned. So we pass through the splendid and ruthless image of the ' vessel under sail ' to the description of the sword as ' death's stamp,' a description which gives it the destructive weight and inflexibility of a battering ram. These things prepare us for the entry of a mechanical warrior, a man turned into an instrument of war, grotesquely unaware of the suffering he caused:

> . . . from face to foot
> He was a thing of blood, whose every motion
> Was timed with dying cries.

This impression is further reinforced by the suggestion of an irresistible impact behind ' planet,' which helps to make him, no longer a mere warrior, but an ' instrument ' (the word is significant, in view of what we have already said about the battering-ram) ' of shunless destiny ' against ' the mortal gates of the city.' In that word ' mortal ' is contained not only an expression of helplessness, but a protest on the part of down-trodden life against this insentient minister of fate. Then, to balance the argument, comes that remarkable quickening of the machine which we have already noted, a quickening followed, however, by the renewed grotesque callousness of:

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> . . . he did
> Run reeking o'er the lives of men, as if
> 'T were a perpetual spoil,

and we are left with Coriolanus ' panting ' like a hot-blooded bull after his orgy of destruction. In this way, right through Cominius' eulogy, Shakespeare holds a balance which is essential to a proper reading of the play.

In case it be thought that too much stress has been laid upon a single passage (though the power and immediacy of the imagery is enough to dispose of such an objection) it can easily be shown how this balance is preserved throughout the play, and is, indeed, an integral part of its structure. There is the feeling of the iron, mechanical warrior in the earliest scenes, as when Titus Lartius speaks of:

> . . . thy grim looks and
> The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds ;

and, at the end, when Coriolanus seems to be on the point of taking his revenge on Rome, we have a very remarkable prose passage from Menenius:

> *Menenius :* The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes: when he walks, he moves like an engine, and the ground shrinks before his treading: he is able to pierce a corslet with his eye ; talks like a knell, and his hum is a battery. He sits in his state, as a thing made for Alexander. What he bids to be done, is finished with his bidding. He wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in.
>
> *Sicinius :* Yes, mercy, if you report him truly.
>
> *Menenius :* I paint him in the character. Mark what mercy his mother shall bring from him ; there is no more mercy in him than there is milk in a male tiger.

This is a fine example of the prose of Shakespeare's late period, prose which is not content merely to develop the facts of a situation, but is informed with the same continual consciousness of the emotional unity of the play as that which informs the verse. Passing by that fine enlistment of the palate in the opening image,

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we come once more to a description of the human war-machine, this time absolutely explicit. The later part of the speech suggests not only the grotesque lack of human feeling in this machine, but also the futility of this artificial insentience. This comparison of Coriolanus' pretentions with a state of divinity was clearly Shakespeare's expression of a fundamental criticism, for he had already put it once into the mouth of the tribunes ; Brutus had said :

> You speak of the people,
> As if you were a god to punish, not
> A man of their infirmity.

On a great many accounts of this play, it would be very hard to explain the wisdom of these utterances, given to the otherwise detestable tribunes. But, as we have suggested, Shakespeare's insight was keener than that of his critics, and so the tribunes are allowed to throw the clearest light of all upon Coriolanus' futility. And this futility is brought home to us by a further stroke of irony, for we know, as Menenius does not, that this would-be implacable warrior has not only self-consciously paraded his firmness before Aufidius—

> Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow,
> In the same time 't is made? I will not . . .
>
> Aufidius, and you Volsces, mark ; for we'll
> Hear nought from Rome in private. Your request?

—but has capitulated at the very moment of his posing. As Aufidius says, with a bitter cynicism which is part of the spirit of this play :

> At a few drops of woman's rheum, which are
> As cheap as lies, he sold the blood and honour
> Of our great action . . .

That, at least, is one aspect of Coriolanus' career as a warrior.

The other aspect, however, as we have already suggested in discussing Cominius' speech, is equally present. There is no question that this play connects the action of war with a sense of splendid and living ecstasy. The most obvious example is to be found in the scene where Coriolanus first meets Aufidius, after his exile, and the Volscian general addresses him in the following terms :

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> Let me twine
> Mine arms about that body, where against
> My grained ash an hundred times hath broke,
> And scarr'd the moon with splinters: here I clip
> The anvil of my sword, and do contest
> As hotly and as nobly with thy love
> As ever in ambitious strength I did
> Contend against thy valour. Know thou first,
> I loved the maid I married ; never man
> Sig'd truer breath ; but that I see thee here,
> Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
> Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
> Bestride my threshold.

The note of exultation reminds us once more of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Here too the life that expresses itself in war is communicated in terms of love. From Aufidius' behaviour in this play, we should not have expected him to express ecstasy (if, indeed, such a word were within the compass of his experience) in terms of his own emotions in love. But the justification, of course, is less in character than in the emotional make-up of the play. In character, the discrepancy between poetry and behaviour helps to emphasize the dual nature of Aufidius, poised oddly between heroism and treachery prompted by jealous selfishness, just as Coriolanus, in Cominius' speech, is poised between divinity and insentience. But these divergences of personal principle are only products of the disharmony we have found in the social analysis of the play, and this analysis is merely a projection of the original poetic mood. The martial exaltation of Coriolanus and Aufidius is counterbalanced by their respective brutality and treachery, in the same way as the superior keenness and vividness of the senses in Menenius' opening parable is necessarily attached to the grossness of ' the cormorant belly,' from which they try in vain to escape.

A type of poetry which is identical in quality with that we have just discussed in Aufidius is also to be found in Coriolanus himself, as we shall see if we consider some of the speeches, which are among his finest, made when he returns to his family after his triumph at Corioli. Mr. Murry has pointed to the beauty of:

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> My gracious silence, hail!
> Wouldst thou have laugh'd had I come coffin'd home,
> That weep'st to see me triumph?

The experience with which the critic of *Coriolanus* has to establish contact is one that, whilst forming a single emotional whole, has to include the divergence between this and the warrior who ' moves like an engine ' over the corpses he has battered to death. That is the central contradiction, to which those in Aufidius' behaviour are merely subsidiary. There is a split at the heart of Shakespeare's experience, which introduces a division into the fabric of his play, both at Rome and at Corioli. That sensation of life as expressed in terms of passion, which Shakespeare worked out so triumphantly in Antony, is here studied, probably at almost the same period, in its relationship to war ; and war is seen as a product of the same life, but one which tends to the death which is its opposite. *Coriolanus*, in fact, is the complement of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and its reversal. In the latter play, defeat in war was only the prelude to a triumph in the vitality of love, expressed above all in Cleopatra's death ; in *Coriolanus*, victory in war was accompanied by a callous hardening of feeling, which only re-asserted itself to give an ironic note to the hero's fate.

It is worth while, at this point, to refer a little more fully to the irony of the play, because this gives it a note which is not easily squared with its usual definition as a tragedy ; this fact helps, perhaps more than anything, to account for the prevalent critical uneasiness. This irony is a critical irony: that is, it springs out of a vigilant hostility to unsustained pretensions and unexamined enthusiasms. Perhaps its most successful expression is that exposure of the characters of Volumnia and Valeria (I.3), which shows the lack of human feeling in Coriolanus to be rooted in the outlook of his family, and so, in turn, in the general social maladjustments we have already discussed. In this way, the scene has an important structural position, for it serves to connect the personal ' tragedy ' of *Coriolanus*—if we may use the word ' tragedy ' in the highly individual way demanded by this play—with the wider social study. The scene is an invention of Shakespeare's ; one cannot imagine that Plutarch would have thought of Valeria speaking of Coriolanus' son in this way:

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> ' O' my word, the father's son ; I'll swear, 't is a very pretty boy. O' my troth, I looked upon him o' Wednesday half an hour together ; has such a confirmed countenance. I saw him run after a gilded butterfly ; and when he caught it, he let it go again ; and after it again ; and over and over he comes, and up again ; catched it again ; or whether his fall enraged him, or how 't was, he did so set his teeth, and tear it ; O, I warrant, how he mammocked it!'

The whole passage is a sufficient exposure of the deadly lack of feeling which surrounded Coriolanus, and of which he partook ; indeed, it is emphasized that the boy is ' his father's son.' To complete the impression, we need only the crushing irony implicit in Valeria's next comment—' Indeed, la, 't is a noble child.' The author of this scene was the same who had once written Falstaff's penetrating remarks on ' honour ' in the assured balance of a spirit that was not less artistic for being truly critical. Instead of Sir Walter Blunt's ' grinning honour,' we have Volumnia's ideal:

> ' . . . had I a dozen sons, . . . I had rather eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action.'

But in *Coriolanus*, the clear-sighted outlook of *Henry IV* is reinforced by the experience gained in the whole body of the tragedies, so that it becomes part of an emotional whole more complex than itself. A good deal in the study of the hero was taken from traditional sources ; Plutarch, according to North, had already suggested that Coriolanus was ' so cholericke and impacient, that he would yeeld to no living creature: which made him churlishe, unciuill, and altogether unfit for any man's conuersation.' It it also true that there was a substantial precedent in traditional farce for the refusal to accept a great classical warrior at the most heroic estimate ; Shakespeare had done this himself in *Troilus*. When the Roman soldiers refuse to follow Coriolanus into the gates of the besieged city, and when he scolds the people with most unheroic vituperation, his behaviour was not strange to an Elizabethan mind. Only the scholars might be shocked.

When we have accounted for all this, however, there remains the essence of Shakespeare's achievement to be accounted for. As we have suggested, the greatness and uniqueness of this play, which

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has so disconcerted many of its readers, is due to the fact that Shakespeare judged the political situation in Rome in the light of his own experience developed in the tragedies. The failure of Coriolanus, contrasted with the triumphant life of Antony, is a failure in sensitivity, a failure in living ; and it represents a failure on the part of a whole society. The hero is shown always in relation to that society, and conditioned by it ; it explains him, and his tragedy illuminates it. Perhaps the fundamental quality of the verse lies in the sense of a continual clash between a certain natural fineness of sensibility and an iron rigidity which accompanies and contrasts with it. Some of these contrasts are expressed in incidental comparisons that have a magnificent tactual immediacy ; such are:

> When steel grows soft as the parasite's silk,

and:

> . . . nature,
> Not to be other than one thing, not moving
> From the casque to the cushion, but commanding peace
> Even with the same austerity and garb
> As he controll'd the war . . .

where the first gives an immediate impression of different and opposed textures in the closest contact, and where the second emphasizes the contrast between the casques and the cushion by the rigid strength given in ' austerity and garb.' Such passages indicate the quality of the play. In it we find a sensation of life expressed in terms of a transcendant passion, but continually chafing against the iron of an unnatural rigidity, which is an individual inflexibility, a stiffness in family relations, and a hardened social order. Coriolanus' great lyric passages are not continual and spontaneous, like those of Antony. They seem rather to burst out against a perpetual restraint, to be produced by a continual friction against the iron insentience which he inherited. Coriolanus is hopelessly divided between his unnatural discipline of ' honour ' and his natural humanity. That is the real source of the play's irony, and the reason why he never carries any course to its complete fulfilment. His ' honour ' is turned by his class and family into a willingness, if only temporary, to gain power at any price. There are few things in Shakespeare more ironic than the

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way he has to use his wounds to gain election to the consulship ; but, having disgraced himself (be it noted), his natural pride intervenes, and he falls. But, precisely because he is divided, his reaction does not reinstate him as a heroic character, but expresses itself in petulant and ridiculous curses against the ' common cry of curs,' ' the reek o' the rotten fens,' the people whom he had just courted to gain power. The same essential contradiction is seen in his last exploits. Egoism always prompted him to his wars ; we are told in the opening dialogue, that his prowess was due to his desire ' to please his mother, and to be partly proud.' It drove him to neglect all natural feeling and to return at the head of his old enemies to sack Rome. Such a change, after his sworn hatred of Aufidius, was itself ironic. But such an inhuman project could not overcome the other part of his nature—what should have been in a harmonious personality natural feeling, and was in his divided nature weakness—so that he gave up his idea in the very moment of success. Such division and paralysis could only end in his rather absurd and ironic death. Shakespeare makes him die indignant at being called ' Boy!' by those he had once beaten, in a mixture of ' scolding ' (by his own confession) and an attempt to justify himself in the light of his past exploits. Such justification is felt to be the final proof of futility.

Coriolanus is a very great play. It suggests how valuable might be a sensitive artist's study of a social situation, what weight a fine experience could add to otherwise ephemeral political discussion. It provides, too, an unparalleled relation between tragedy and irony which has a certain relevance to the modern situation. A small part of Shakespeare's capacity for deep experience would have made impossible the weakness and inadequacy of a work like Auden's *Dog Beneath the Skin*. It would inevitably have broken into the pitifully facile development of the author's thesis, and exposed the device by which insubstantial characters are set up to be destroyed in the interests of a dogma that has never been enriched by a free and unconditioned response to life. But such a work of destruction could only be salutary, and the vitality which accomplished it might later bear fruit in a play in which social analysis could play its part without frustration by moral and artistic poverty.

D. A. TRAVERSI.

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LITERARY CRITICISM AND PHILOSOPHY: A REPLY[1]

I MUST thank Dr. Wellek, not merely for his explicit compliments (which, coming from a dissentient critic, are especially gratifying), but for bringing fundamental criticism to my work, and above all for raising in so complete a way an issue that a reviewer or two had more or less vaguely touched on—an issue of which no one can have been more conscious than myself, who had seen the recognition of it as an essential constituent of what I naturally (whatever the quality of my performance) hoped for: an appreciation of my undertaking. Dr. Wellek points out, justly, that in my dealings with English poetry I have made a number of assumptions that I neither defend nor even state: 'I could wish,' he says, 'that you had made your assumptions more explicitly and defended them systematically.' After offering me a summary of these assumptions, he asks me to 'defend this position abstractly and to become conscious that large ethical, philosophical and, of course, ultimately, also æsthetic *choices* are involved.'

I in my turn would ask Dr. Wellek to believe that if I omitted to undertake the defence he desiderates it was not from any lack of consciousness: I knew I was making assumptions (even if I didn't—and shouldn't now—state them to myself quite as he states them) and I was not less aware than I am now of what they involve. I am interested that he should be able to say that, for the most part, he shares them with me. But, he adds, he would 'have misgivings in pronouncing them without elaborating a specific defence or a theory in their defence.'—That, I suggest, is because Dr. Wellek is a philosopher; and my reply to him in the first place is that I myself am not a philosopher, and that I doubt whether in any case I could elaborate a theory that he would find satisfactory. I am not, however, relying upon modesty for my defence. If I profess myself so freely to be no philosopher it is because I feel that I can afford my modesty; it is because I have

[1]See *Scrutiny* for March.

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pretensions—pretensions to being a literary critic. And I would add that even if I had felt qualified to satisfy Dr. Wellek on his own ground I should have declined to attempt it in that book.

Literary criticism and philosophy seem to me to be quite distinct and different kinds of discipline—at least, I think they ought to be (for while in my innocence I hope that philosophic writing commonly represents a serious discipline, I am quite sure that literary-critical writing commonly doesn't). This is not to suggest that a literary critic might not, as such, be the better for a philosophic training, but if he were, the advantage, I believe, would manifest itself partly in a surer realization that literary criticism is not philosophy. I pulled up just short of saying 'the two disciplines . . . ', a phrase that might suggest too great a simplification: it is no doubt possible to point to valuable writing of various kinds representing varying kinds of alliance between the literary critic and the philosopher. But I am not the less sure that it is necessary to have a strict literary criticism somewhere and to vindicate literary criticism as a distinct and separate discipline.

The difficulty that one who approaches with the habit of one kind of discipline has in duly recognizing the claims of a very different kind—the difficulty of reconciling the two in a working alliance—seems to me to be illustrated in Dr. Wellek's way of referring to the business of literary criticism: 'Allow me,' he says, 'to sketch your ideal of poetry, your "norm" with which you measure every poet . . . ' That he should slip into this way of putting things seems to me significant, for he would on being challenged agree, I imagine, that it suggests a false idea of the procedure of the critic. At any rate, he gives me an excuse for making, by way of reminder, some elementary observations about that procedure.

By the critic of poetry I understand the complete reader: the ideal critic is the ideal reader. The reading demanded by poetry is of a different kind from that demanded by philosophy. I should not find it easy to define the difference satisfactorily, but Dr. Wellek knows what it is and could give at least as good an account of it as I could. Philosophy, we say, is 'abstract' (thus Dr. Wellek asks me to defend my position 'more abstractly'), and poetry 'concrete.' Words in poetry invite us, not to 'think about' and

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judge but to ' feel into ' or ' become '—to realize a complex experience that is given in the words. They demand, not merely a fuller-bodied response, but a completer responsiveness—a kind of responsiveness that is incompatible with the judicial, one-eye-on-the-standard approach suggested by Dr. Wellek's phrase: ' your " norm " with which you measure every poet.' The critic—the reader of poetry—is indeed concerned with evaluation, but to figure him as measuring with a norm which he brings up to the object and applies from the outside is to misrepresent the process. The critic's aim is, first, to realize as sensitively and completely as possible this or that which claims his attention ; and a certain valuing is implicit in the realizing. As he matures in experience of the new thing he asks, explicitly and implicitly: ' Where does this come? How does it stand in relation to . . . ? How relatively important does it seem ? ' And the organization into which it settles as a constituent in becoming ' placed ' is an organization of similarly ' placed ' things, things that have found their bearings with regard to one another, and not a theoretical system or a system determined by abstract considerations.

No doubt (as I have admitted) a philosophic training might possibly—ideally would—make a critic surer and more penetrating in the perception of significance and relation and in the judgment of value. But it is to be noted that the improvement we ask for is of the critic, the critic as critic, and to count on it would be to count on the attainment of an arduous ideal. It would be reasonable to fear—to fear blunting of edge, blurring of focus and muddled misdirection of attention: consequences of queering one discipline with the habits of another. The business of the literary critic is to attain a peculiar completeness of response and to observe a peculiarly strict relevance in developing his response into commentary ; he must be on his guard against abstracting improperly from what is in front of him and against any premature or irrelevant generalizing—of it or from it. His first concern is to enter into possession of the given poem (let us say) in its concrete fulness, and his constant concern is never to lose his completeness of possession, but rather to increase it. In making value-judgments (and judgments as to significance), implicitly or explicitly, he does so out of that completeness of possession and with that fulness of response. He doesn't ask, ' How does this accord with these

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specifications of goodness in poetry ? ' ; he aims to make fully conscious and articulate the immediate sense of value that ' places ' the poem.

Of course, the process of ' making fully conscious and articulate ' is a process of relating and organizing, and the ' immediate sense of value ' should, as the critic matures with experience, represent a growing stability of organization (the problem is to combine stability with growth). What, on testing and re-testing and wider experience, turn out to be my more constant preferences, what the relative permanencies in my response, and what structure begins to assert itself in the field of poetry with which I am familiar? What map or chart of English poetry as a whole represents my utmost consistency and most inclusive coherence of response?

From this consistency and this coherence (in so far as I have achieved them) it should, of course, be possible to elicit principles and abstractly formulable norms. Dr. Wellek's first criticism of me is (to give it its least exceptionable force) that I haven't proceeded to elicit them ; that, having written the book I undertook to write, I haven't gone on to write another book in which I develop the theoretical implications of the first (for it would be essentially a matter of two books, even if there were only one binding). To this I make again my modest reply that I doubt, in any case, my capacity to satisfy Dr. Wellek in this respect. And I add again that I do not think my modesty has any adverse bearing on my qualifications for writing the book I did undertake to write. The cogency I hoped to achieve was to be for other readers of poetry—readers of poetry as such. I hoped, by putting in front of them in a criticism that should keep as close to the concrete as possible my own developed ' coherence of response,' to get them to agree (with, no doubt, critical qualifications) that the map, the essential order, of English poetry seen as a whole did, when they interrogated their experience, look like that to them also. Ideally I ought perhaps (though, I repeat, I should not put my position in quite the terms Dr. Wellek ascribes to me) to be able to complete the work with a theoretical statement. But I am sure that the kind of work that I have attempted comes first, and would, for such a theoretical statement to be worth anything, have to be done first.

If Dr. Wellek should still insist that I ought, even if I declined

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to elaborate the philosophy implicit in my assumptions, at any rate to have been more explicit about them, I can only reply that I think I have gone as far in explicitness as I could profitably attempt to go, and that I do not see what would be gained by the kind of explicitness he demands (though I see what is lost by it). Has any reader of my book been less aware of the essential criteria that emerge than he would have been if I had laid down such general propositions as: ' poetry must be in serious relation to actuality, it must have a firm grasp of the actual, of the object, it must be in relation to life, it must not be cut off from direct vulgar living, it should be normally human . . . '? If, as I did, I avoided such generalities, it was not out of timidity ; it was because they seemed too clumsy to be of any use. I thought I had provided something better. My whole effort was to work in terms of concrete judgments and particular analyses: ' This—doesn't it?—bears such a relation to that ; this kind of thing—don't you find it so?—wears better than that,' etc. If I had to generalize, my generalization regarding the relation between poetry and ' direct vulgar living ' or the ' actual ' would run rather in the following way than in that suggested by Dr. Wellek: traditions, or prevailing conventions or habits, that tend to cut poetry in general off from direct vulgar living and the actual, or that make it difficult for the poet to bring into poetry his most serious interests as an adult living in his own time, have a devitalizing effect. But I cannot see that I should have added to the clarity, cogency or usefulness of my book by enunciating such a proposition (or by arguing it theoretically). Again, I did not say that the language of poetry ' should not flatter the singing voice, should not be merely mellifluous,' etc. I illustrated concretely in comparison and analysis the qualities indicated by those phrases, pointed to certain attendant limitations, and tried to show in terms of actual poetic history that there were serious disadvantages to be recognized in a tradition that insisted on such qualities as essential to poetry. In fact, though I am very much aware of the shortcomings of my work, I feel that by my own methods I have attained a relative precision that makes this summarizing seem intolerably clumsy and inadequate. I do not, again, argue in general terms that there should be ' no emotion for its own sake, no afflatus, no mere generous emotionality, no luxury in pain and joy ' ; but by choice,

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arrangement and analysis of concrete examples I give those phrases (in so far, that is, as I have achieved my purpose) a precision of meaning they couldn't have got in any other way. There is, I hope, a chance that I may in this way have advanced theory, even if I haven't done the theorizing. I know that the cogency and precision I have aimed at are limited ; but I believe that any approach involves limitations, and that it is by recognizing them and working within them that one may hope to get something done.

Dr. Wellek has a further main criticism to bring against me: it is that my lack of interest in philosophy makes me unfair to the poets of the Romantic period. I hope he will forgive me if I say that his demonstration has, for me, mainly the effect of demonstrating how difficult it is to be a philosopher and a literary critic at the same time. The positive aim of his remarks he sums as being ' to show that the romantic view of the world . . . underlies and pervades the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley, elucidates many apparent difficulties, and is, at least, a debatable view of the world.'—' The romantic view of the world,' a view common to Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley and others—yes, I have heard of it ; but what interest can it have for the literary critic? For the critic, for the reader whose primary interest is in poetry, those three poets are so radically different, immediately and finally, from one another that the offer to assimilate them in a common philosophy can only suggest the irrelevance of the philosophic approach.

My attitude towards Blake Dr. Wellek, I think, misunderstands. He certainly misrepresents my verdict on the particular poem, the *Introduction* to *Songs of Experience*. The comparison with *Ash-Wednesday* has a context in the chapter to which the note challenged by Dr. Wellek is appended, and, so far from arguing that Blake's poem is ' so ambiguous as to have no " right sense," ' I have in that note the explicit aim of showing how Blake, with his astonishingly original technique, achieves something like the extraordinary precision of *Ash-Wednesday*. And in general, where Blake is concerned, my intention is the reverse of a slighting one. My view of the poem, in fact, seems to me more favourable than that implied by Dr. Wellek, who says: 'Actually, I think the poem has only one possible meaning, which

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can be ascertained by a study of the whole of Blake's symbolical philosophy.' I myself, a literary critic, am interested in Blake because it is possible to say with reference to some of his work that his symbolical philosophy is one thing, his poetry another. I know that even in his best poetry symbolism appears, and I was aware of symbolism in the poem I picked on ; but I judged that I might fairly avoid a large discussion that seemed inessential to the point I was proposing to make.

I will say now, though, that when in Blake's poetry his symbols function poetically they have, I believe, a life that is independent of his ' symbolical philosophy ' : for instance, ' Earth,' ' starry pole,' ' dewy grass ' and ' wat'ry shore,' in the *Introduction* to *Songs of Experience*, seem to me to have a direct evocative power. Knowledge of Blake's arbitrary assignment of value to a symbol may often help to explain why he should have written as he has done here, there and elsewhere ; I do not believe that it will ever turn what was before an unsuccessful poem into a good one. And I think *Hear the voice of the Bard !* decidedly a good one. Dr. Wellek's account of it seems to me to justify my assumption that I could fairly discuss the poem without talking about symbols ; for I cannot see that his account tends to invalidate mine. I cannot, in fact, see why he should suppose it does. Or rather, I see it is because he assumes that what we are elucidating is a text of symbolical philosophy—written as such and to be read as such.

The confidence of his paraphrase made me open my eyes. It is a philosopher's confidence—the confidence of one who in the double strength of a philosophic training and a knowledge of Blake's system ignores the working of poetry. The main difference, one gathers, between the philosopher and the poet is that to the poet there may be allowed, in the interests of rhythm and formal matters like that, a certain looseness, a laxity of expression: ' Delete " and " (in line 7) which was inserted only because of the rhythm and sense is quite clear '—Yes, immediately clear, if one derives from a study of ' the whole of Blake's symbolical philosophy ' the confidence to perform these little operations. But I myself believe that in this poem Blake is using words with very unusual precision—the precision of a poet working as a poet.

And it is this precision that Dr. Wellek ignores in his paraphrase and objects to my noticing:

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> ' In spite of his fall Man might yet control the universe (" the starry pole ") . . . The next " that " cannot possibly refer to God, but to the soul or to Man, who after his re-birth might control the " starry pole." There is no need to evoke Lucifer.'

—' Man ' capable of controlling the universe may surely be said to have taken on something of God, and may be, I suggest, in Blake's syntax—in his peculiar organization of meaning—not so sharply distinguishable from God as Dr. Wellek's notion of ' clear sense ' and ' one possible meaning ' demands. And if ' fallen, fallen light ' does not for Dr. Wellek bring into the complex of associations Lucifer—

> from morn
> To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
> A summer's day, and with the setting sun,
> Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
> On Lemnos, the Aegean isle

—then I think we have an instance of the philosopher disabling the critic ; an instance of the philosophical approach inducing in the reader of poetry a serious impercipience or insensitiveness. Blake is not referring to abstract ideas of Man and rebirth ; he works in the concrete, evoking by a quite unproselike (that was my point) use of associations a sense of a state of desolation that is the more grievous by contrast with an imagined state of bliss, in which Man, in harmonious mastery of his full potentialities, might be godlike—an unfallen and unsinful Lucifer (Milton, we remember was of the Devil's party without knowing it).

> ' The twinkling stars in Blake mean always the light of Reason and the watery shore the limit of matter or of Time and Space. The identification of Earth and Man in this poem is explicitly recognized by Blake in the illustration to this very poem which represents a masculine figure lying upon the "watery shore " and, with the " starry floor " as a background, painfully lifting his head.'

—I would call Dr. Wellek's attention to the poem, *Earth's Answer*, immediately following that which is under discussion. It opens:

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Earth raised up *her* head
From the darkness dread and drear.
Her light fled,
Stony dread!
And her locks cover'd with grey despair.

' Prison'd on wat'ry shore,
' Starry Jealousy does keep my den:
' Cold and hoar,
' Weeping o'er,
' I hear the father of the ancient men.'

I quote these stanzas as a way of suggesting to him that his neat and confident translation of symbols will not do (I am not saying that ' Reason ' and ' Jealousy ' could not be reconciled), and that even an argument from one of Blake's illustrations may not be as coercive as Dr. Wellek supposes.

Again where Wordsworth is concerned Dr. Wellek seems to misunderstand my intention. ' So contrary to your own conclusion' (p. 164), he says, ' I would maintain the coherence, unity, and subtlety of Wordsworth's thought.'—Well, I had heard of and read about Wordsworth's thought, which, indeed, has received a great deal of notice, but my business was with Wordsworth's poetry ; I never proposed, and do not propose now, to consider him as a philosophic thinker. When I look up p. 164 in my book I find this as the only passage Dr. Wellek can be referring to: ' His philosophizing (in the sense of the Hartleian studies and applications) had not the value he meant it to have ; but it is an expression of his intense moral seriousness and a mode of that essential discipline of contemplation which gave consistency and stability to his experience.' In saying that Wordsworth's philosophizing hadn't the value he meant it to have I was pointing out that it hadn't the relation he supposed to his business as a poet, and my analysis still seems to me conclusive. Dr. Wellek merely says in general terms that it isn't conclusive for him: ' I cannot see why the argument of Canto II of the *Prelude* could not be paraphrased.'—It can, I freely grant, be very easily paraphrased if one brings to it a general knowledge of the kind of thought involved and an assumption that poets put loosely what philosophers formulate with precision. For would Dr. Wellek in

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prose philosophy be satisfied with, or even take seriously, such looseness of statement and argument as Wordsworth's in his philosophic verse? If so, he has a very much less strict criterion for philosophy as philosophy than I have for poetry as poetry. Even if Wordsworth had a philosophy, it is as a poet that he matters, and if we remember that even where he offers 'thought' the strength of what he gives is the poet's we shall, as critics, find something better to do than supply precision and completeness to his abstract argument.

I do not see what service Dr. Wellek does either himself or philosophy by adducing chapter V of *Science and the Modern World*. That an eminent mathematician, logician and speculative philosopher should be so interested in poetry as Professor Whitehead there shows himself to be is pleasing; but I have always thought the quality of his dealings with poetry to be exactly what one would expect of an authority so qualified. I will add, perhaps wantonly and irrelevantly, that the utterances of Professor Whitehead's quoted by Dr. Wellek look to me like bad poetry; in their context no doubt they become something different, but I cannot see why even then they should affect a literary critic's view of Wordsworth and Shelley.

When Dr. Wellek comes to Shelley he hardly makes any serious show of sustaining his case against me and the weakness of his own approach is most clearly exposed. He is so interested in philosophy that he pays no real attention to my analyses of poetry. Take, for instance, his suggested interpretations of points in the *Ode to the West Wind*: it is not merely that they are, it seems to me, quite unacceptable; even if they were otherwise, they would make no substantial difference to my carefully elaborated analysis of the way in which Shelley's poetry works. And why should Dr. Wellek suppose that he is defending Shelley in arguing that 'the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean may allude to "the old mystical conception of the two trees of Heaven and Earth intertwining"'? Not that I attack the *Ode to the West Wind*; I merely illustrate from it the characteristic working of Shelley's poetry.

Nor do I attack *Mont Blanc*. When Dr. Wellek says, 'I cannot see the slightest confusion in the opening paragraph of *Mont Blanc*,' he seems to me to be betraying an inappreciation of Shelley

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—an inappreciation explained by the approach intimated in his next sentence: 'It states an epistemological proposition quite clearly.' Now to me the opening paragraph of *Mont Blanc* evokes with great vividness a state of excited bewilderment and wonder. The obvious Wordsworthian element in the poem suggests a comparison with Wordsworth, and, regarding as I do the two poets, not as stating epistemological propositions or asserting general conceptions, but as reacting characteristically to similar concrete occasions, the comparison I actually make seems to me justified. When Dr. Wellek tells me that the passage I quote from the *Prelude* 'has philosophically nothing to do with the introduction of Shelley's *Mont Blanc*,' he merely confirms my conviction that philosophy and literary criticism are very different things.

Having described certain Shelleyan habits I go on to point out that these carry with them a tendency to certain vices; vices such that, in diagnosing them, the literary critic finds himself becoming explicitly a moralist. I conduct the argument very carefully and in terms of particular analysis, and I cannot see that Dr. Wellek makes any serious attempt to deal with it. I cannot see why he should think that his alternative interpretation of the third stanza of *When the lamp is shattered* makes that poem less bad in any of the ways in which I have judged it adversely. But I do see that, *not* reading as a literary critic, he fails to respond with his sensibility to the peculiarly Shelleyan virtue, the personal voice, of the last stanza, and so fails to realize the force of my radical judgment on the poem (I cannot recapitulate the whole argument here).

Actually, of course, Dr. Wellek's attention is elsewhere than on Shelley's poetry and my analysis. 'These notes,' he slips into saying, 'are made only to support my main point that Shelley's philosophy, I think, is astonishingly unified, and perfectly coherent.'—I do not consider it my business to discuss that proposition, and Dr. Wellek has given me no grounds for judging Shelley's poetry to be anything other than I have judged it to be. If, in reply to my charge that Shelley's poetry is repetitive, vaporous, monotonously self-regarding and often emotionally cheap, and so, in no very long run, boring, Dr. Wellek tells me that Shelley was an idealist, I can only wonder whether some unfavourable presumption has not been set up about idealism. Again, it is no

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consolation for disliking the characteristic Shelleyan vapour to be told:

> 'This fusing of the spheres of the different senses in Shelley is exactly paralleled in his rapid transitions and fusions of the emotions, from pleasure to pain, from sorrow to joy. Shelley would like us similarly to ignore or rather to transcend the boundaries of individuality between persons just as Indian philosophy or Schopenhauer wants us to overcome the curse and burden of the *principium individuationis*.'

—Of course, according to that philosophy poetry may be a mistake or illusion, something to be left behind. But Dr. Wellek will hardly bring it against me that I have been unfair to Shelley's poetry out of lack of sympathy with such a view.

Unfairness to poets out of lack of interest in their philosophy he does, of course, in general charge me with. His note concludes:

> 'Your book . . . raises anew the question of the poet's "belief" and how far sympathy with this belief and comprehension of it is necessary for an appreciation of the poetry. A question which has been debated a good deal, as you know, and which I would not like to solve too hastily on the basis of your book.'

—I will only comment, without wishing to question the justice of this conclusion, that Dr. Wellek seems to me to assume too easily that the poet's essential 'belief' is what can be most readily extracted as such from his works by a philosopher.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

MRS. WOOLF AND LIFE

THE YEARS, by Virginia Woolf (Hogarth Press, 8/6).

Mrs. Woolf, we all know, is a Poet in Prose; or rather she has—perhaps one should say had—a range of sensuous impressions which would have stood a great poet in good stead. But sensuous impressions, though they are immensely important and perhaps the only means whereby a poet can make his apprehensions and his attitudes concrete and comprehensible, are not an end in themselves; if they were, most normally sensitive children would be great poets. Of course, Mrs. Woolf is an 'intelligent woman' but, as a reviewer in the *Calendar* pointed out[1] on the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*, her intellectual capacity is oddly disproportionate to, and immature compared with, her sensitiveness, and, if she ventures outside the narrow range imposed on her by her sensuousness, she becomes a child. Since the range of experience implied in sensuous apprehension purely and simply, is, indeed, necessarily so limited, it is perhaps significant that the only occasion when she has been able to use her impressions, in their various subtle inter-relations, to form an organization, a whole, has been when she was concerned, to some extent at least, with personal reminiscence; and it is probable, moreover, that what she did in *To the Lighthouse* could only be done once.

In this book, anyway, Mrs. Woolf used her impressions triumphantly as imaginative concepts, and she perfected an original technique to express the order which she apprehended within these impressions. As she is a sensuous artist, and what the senses perceive is transitory and mutable, she saw them as dominated by Time; and she found a central symbol for her theme so just and integral that it is not as oversimple as it may superficially appear, to say that what differentiates *To the Lighthouse* from Mrs. Woolf's other books is precisely that in this work alone *something really happens*—the trip to the Lighthouse. And

[1]See *Towards Standards of Criticism*, p. 48ff.

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here, because she has kept within her limitations, her conception of human relationships and of moral values is delicate and sure. (Mrs. Ramsay has positive life, is something compelling and potent). But how limited this conception nevertheless is, is suggested by the somewhat suspicious easiness of the middle section (Time Passes). Even in this book, where her poetry is so consummately incarnated, her attitude is ultimately that of the ' sensitive ' young girl who, growing old in years, looks back and remembers.

When she had written *To the Lighthouse* there were three courses open to Mrs. Woolf. Either she could enlarge her scope, do something fresh ; or she could stop writing altogether ; or she could cheat by way of technique. She chose the last of these alternatives. In *The Waves* there is a fatal falsification between what her impressions actually are and what they are supposed to signify—they are pinned to her prose like so many dead butterflies. Mrs. Woolf goes through the appropriate gestures (doors open, doors shut), uses the appropriate formulæ, (the rose blossoms, the petal falls), but the champing beast on the shore confesses itself a mechanical toy, and the artificially artful parallel with the waves hardly pretends to be anything more than a parallel. The artfulness of the method makes the immediacy and hence the quality of the impressions themselves deteriorate. The rhythm loses the subtle flexibility of the earlier books falling at times to the bathos of the magazine-story ; (' But if one day you do not come after breakfast, if one day I see you in some looking-glass perhaps looking after another, if the telephone buzzes and buzzes in your empty room, I shall then after unspeakable anguish, I shall then—for there is no end to the folly of the human heart—seek another, find another, you. Meanwhile, let us abolish the ticking of time's clock with one blow. Come closer.') ; while many of the ' poetical ' images betray only too patently their genesis. (' A crack of light knelt on the wall '). A rudimentary analysis of any characteristic passage suffices to prove, indeed, that, shorn of the ' original ' technique, what Mrs. Woolf has to say about the relationship between her characters, about the business of living, is both commonplace and sentimental.

The hero-worship of Percival (' a great master of the art of living ') is perhaps a minor point, though symptomatic ; but the

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radical weakness and falsity of the book is revealed in the central position occupied by Bernard, the maker of phrases. 'Now you tug at my skirts, looking back, making phrases . . . I shall be a clinger to the outsides of words all my life . . . There is some flaw in me, some fatal hesitancy, which if I pass it over, turns to foam and falsity.' There could be no more accurate description of what Mrs. Woolf is doing in *The Waves* ; essentially her attitude is that of the undergraduette- or Bloomsbury-poet. 'There are stories, but what are stories? What is the thing that lies behind the semblance of the thing?' Our lives are shrouded in obscurity and knowing nothing we turn on our wistfullest smiles and tread our way to the grave. It is difficult to see how an honest reader can discover any more 'profundity' in *The Waves* than this ; and if there *is* any form in these multiple incoherencies the trick lies in Bernard's 'I retrieve them from formlessness with words.' It is only a trick, and a pretty threadbare one at that. We must note, too, the complete disappearance of the irony that gave such subtlety of poise to *To the Lighthouse* ; though Mrs. Woolf is 'critical,' there is no evidence that she hasn't, with Bernard, a sympathy which amounts to an implicit self-identification.

Whatever lingering doubts we may have entertained about the validity of *The Waves* are resolved with dismal finality when we consider Mrs. Woolf's new novel, *The Years*, in which, without the superficial screen of Experimental Technique, she reveals the same sentimentalities and ineptitudes. Presumably the explicit theme is one which had been implicit in the earlier books, the inevitable theme of the sensuous impressionist, 'the passage of time and its tragedy.' Only, as Mrs. Woolf presents it, it isn't tragic, but merely fatuous. It is impossible to find tragedy in the aging of persons who are non-existent, and, far from having the rounded vitality of Mrs. Ramsay, the characters in this novel have not even the facticious existence of the collections of phrases that make up the personæ of *The Waves*. These people are phantoms ; they grow old, but they cannot change because they have never been alive, in so far as they exist at all it is as a bundle of memories. The book is a document of purposelessness. Either life is supremely meaningless, or, as the years go by, there is perhaps a pattern (what has been, will be), yet there is no point in the pattern. The discovery of it entails, indeed, a degree of

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falsification. The repetitions, the cooing doves and the bonfire smoke, are sly and artful, the jig-saw of the litterateur. 'Does everything then come over again a little differently? she thought. If so, is there a pattern, a theme, recurring, like music . . .? But who makes it? Who thinks it? Her mind slipped. She could not finish her thought.' The atmosphere of uncertainty, of ambiguity, is, of course, traded upon. Conversations are misunderstood, thought is incommunicable. 'Who's right? Who's wrong? . . . We cannot make laws and religions that fit because we do not know ourselves . . . If we do not know ourselves how can we know other people?' And consequent upon this purposelessness is a sense of oppressive frustration. People are always having 'the truth' on the tip of the tongue, but are unable (and it is God alone that knows why) to utter it. The 'climax'—pathetic paradox—comes when Nicholas, attempting to make the speech that would at last reveal the secret of their lives, is prevented. 'It was to have been a miracle. A masterpiece! But how can one speak when one is always interrupted . . . I was going to drink to the human race . . . He brought his glass down with a thump on the table. It broke.'

The long final section on the Present Day is, indeed, easily the best part of the book, and here the ambiguity and purposelessness, the frustration, becomes less artful and, paradoxical as it may seem, more sharply focussed, with a quality of passive desolation which is comparable with the neurasthenic weariness and fatigue of Kurt Weill's queerly documentary ballet, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, though it entirely lacks the negative intensity of Weill's music.

> 'Rest, rest, let me rest. How to deaden, how to cease to feel; that was the cry of the women bearing children; to rest, to cease to be . . . not to live; not to feel; to make money, always money, and in the end, when I'm old and worn like a horse, no, it's a cow . . .'

The extraordinarily inert, incantatory rhythm of the prose, and the remotely reminiscent nature of the images—as though the scene were viewed not immediately but in retrospect, distantly as through a mirror or through the glass of an aquarium—produces an effect oddly similar to the gray, drab exhaustion, the unreal nightmarish

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atmosphere of Weill's music, but it is, of course, superficially more 'refined,' more precious.

To speak of Mrs. Woolf's refinement reminds us of her celebrated femininity, which quality seems to go hand in hand with the curiously tepid Bloomsbury prose into which she has always, in unguarded moments, been inclined to trickle. Here, anyway, it only enforces the feeling of weakness and sterility, and one can but reflect dismally on the inanity of a world in which the only positives seem to be 'silence and solitude.' These incoherently reminiscent mumblings seem purposely to ignore the human will and all it entails ; and although we have no right to blame an artist for not doing what he didn't intend to do, the complete omission, in a work which embraces the passage of time during the last fifty years, of (for instance) physical desire may strike us at least as odd. Of course it is obvious enough that Mrs. Woolf's social world is a minute one. The phrase 'feminine intuition,' used in connection with Mrs. Woolf, inevitably invites comparison with Jane Austen and if the latter has social decorum, Mrs. Woolf can only be said to have social decorousness. But, even at her best, for all her air of abysmal profundity, is Mrs. Woolf's spiritual world either quite as far-reaching as it seems?. Some of us may perhaps think that, as a novelist, Mrs. Woolf is too concerned about Life to be concerned, as was Miss Austen, very adequately about living. And if it be objected that Mrs. Woolf is not using the novel *qua* novel but for a poetical end, we return to the point from which we started; and conclude that she is, in the long run, only a very minor sort of poet.

W. H. MELLERS.

MUSIC

A NEW SYMPHONY

On April 30th the B.B.C. gave the first performance of Edmund Duncan Rubbra's *Symphony* at a Concert of Contemporary Music. This work reveals Rubbra as a composer

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with a style of his own, using the all-too-glib phrase in its only serious and important sense ; he has something individual and interesting to say, and he says it clearly and without pretention. The number of living composers of whom this may be said is small enough to make the occasion of the performance of this symphony a memorable one.

This music has a fierce nervous energy which is sometimes comparable with that of Vaughan Williams of the F minor Symphony and Walton of the B flat minor Symphony, yet it is nevertheless patent that it is Rubbra's music and no one else's. The melodic line is extraordinarily alert and sensitive, with a strange quality of latency, and of *precariousness*, which is enhanced by the melodies' tendency to push tonality to the utmost limits while remaining basically diatonic, in a logical framework. The exacerbated intensity of Rubbra's emotions finds spontaneous expression in a counterpoint of fascinating complexity, the liveliness and potency of his basses providing evidence of the genuineness and stability of his craftsmanship. (Rubbra's musical thought is usually instinctively contrapuntal ; *cf.* the recent *Triple Fugue for Orchestra*). Essentially this is masculine music, not, admittedly, tragic or profound, but strong, civilized, inherently sane and healthy. Such toughness of emotion and craftsmanship, such freedom from flabbiness or excess, are rare in modern music and show up the spurious virility and craftsmanship of ' Hindemythology ' for what they are worth, while the rather unexpected delicacy of the melodic lines, particularly in the beautiful fugal coda, indicates how alive Rubbra's mind is, how foolproof is his music against ironic criticism. I'm not quite certain about the Scherzo (*allegro bucolico*), vigorous and delightful as the movement is in itself—I feel that perhaps the ferocious first movement and the elegiac *lento* alone form a ' whole ' ; but one cannot speak with any definiteness till the work has been heard again.

Rubbra is the son of a worker in a Northampton boot factory and has himself been errand-boy and railway clerk. The taut, unaffected masculinity of this music suggests that here is a man—if to-day it is possible at all—to write ' music for the people.' Decidedly his *Symphony* is an event.

W.H.M.

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POETRY IN 1936

THE YEAR'S POETRY, 1936, selection by D. Kilham Roberts and John Lehmann (John Lane, 6/-).

STRAIGHT OR CURLY ? by Clifford Dyment (Dent, 2/6).

SEBASTIAN, by Rayner Heppenstall (Dent, 2/6).

THE STORY OF PSYCHE, by Robert Gittings (C.U.P., 3/6).

CALAMITERROR, by George Barker (Faber and Faber, 5/-).

CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND PROSE, Nos. 6-8.

The Year's Poetry, 1936, is no more useful than the two preceding volumes. The arrangement of poets in order of age shows how near Mr. Eliot is to being even in this respect the Father of Modern Poetry. (Though one of the two poems which represent him here was first published, if memory serves, in 1924). The greater part of the book is taken up by those who have benefited more or less by his example. The samples given here do nothing to mitigate the judgment which is enforced by the examination of their whole published works—that one and all of those who on their first appearance were ' promising ' have failed to come up to that promise, or, more grimly, have fulfilled the tendencies which could be detected from the start. Mr. Macneice displays all the more creditably in this company a poise achieved by the consciousness of his limitations. It is curious to note that even in this generous cross-section of the poetic output, obtained by using extremely eclectic and conflicting standards of what is poetry, there is no representative of the notorious Georgian school.

It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that what the Georgians represented is nowadays dead. *Straight or Curly ?* presents in an apparently acceptable form the up-to-date version of the taste for Georgian poetry, and as such, but merely as such, is of interest. There is a certain amount of the protective colouring of modernism, sufficient for him to pass for a modern. He makes ' over ' rhyme with ' river,' he leaves out little connecting words (' the fields not mute ') and he parodies the fashionable authors either separately or by conflation. Thus we find:

> The bank-clerk with the rolled-up sleeves
> Rests, for a moment, on his spade

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Across the road the baker's man
Jokes with the adolescent maid.

and

Exploiter of the shadows
He moved among the fences,
A strip of action coiling
Around his farmyard fancies.

In one poem he has the following lines:

Image of the rose, of roses,
Curling in this dry land:
Here is no cactus . . .
. . . Image of the rose, of roses,
Bright is the light burning
The weary, the wise, the sorrowful eyes.

But he borrows other manners which one would have thought not fashionable to mix with these.

Ducks do not plan ambitious schemes:
Their commerce is in weeds and streams.
They ask, what's life but sparkle and spray
In a lazy brook on a lazy day? . . .
And I can see that man and duck
Are both cursed by a dancing luck.

But it would be unfair to dwell on this side of the poet's work. For after all, he achieves nothing of his own by these imitations, save to show his eclectic taste, and his lack of any understanding of the reasons why the original writers used these manners. In justice to Mr. Dyment we must admit that his more modern imitations are merely a *façade*. When he is being himself, as far as he can be said to succeed in this, he writes as follows:

I walked a solitary road
And did not hear a sound
Apart from steps that were my own
Falling upon the ground. (*The Singing Sailor*).

It's very fine to read big books,
And talk with clever wit—

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But I prefer to sit at home
To think out things a bit.
(*Song of the Old Village Woman*).

That these rhythms are more truly characteristic of the poet may be more readily believed when his attitudes are examined. It is here that his naïvety is really astonishing. In Leicester Square he observes:

Every person walking by
Was born in someone's agony,
And of the loose anonymous crowd,
Not one will lack a home when dead.

He trapped a mouse and reflects,

The story of that righteous deed
Is now a sword on which I bleed.

The crowning piece of the collection is to be found in *Remorse for Gladness*.

On the morrow, in the sun,
I sat in meditative fun.

. . . I rejoiced within my skin,
And never gave a thought to sin.

How dreadful, then, it was to find
That sin was walking in my mind!

. . . I saw sin walking in the towns,
Shouldering a bag of frowns.

. . . With my own eyes I saw these things,
And sighed that fools should look like kings.

In fairness to the Georgians it must be said that in reviving the deliberate cult of the trivial, of an arch simplicity Mr. Dyment appears much sillier, more naïve. In fact one wonders whether verse such as this has even the excuse of masking an inner confusion. Verse such as this might be written without censure by a girl brought up on Victorian lines, preserved from even a newspaper knowledge of the world, but allowed to read 'Georgian Poetry,' and taught to enjoy words 'for their own sake.' We

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should then smile, admire the technical skill in one so young, and sigh to think that sooner or later the poor child must come to learn that 'life is not like that.' But in view of Mr. Dyment's age . . .

The only reason for treating at length this piffle is that so many persons reputed to be in their senses have bothered to read, and thought fit to print them. (And this is his second volume!) 'Most of the poems in this book,' writes Mr. Dyment, 'have already appeared in the following periodicals and anthologies: *The Criterion, English* (Magazine of the English Association), *Life and Letters To-day, The Listener, The London Mercury, The New Statesman and Nation . . . Time and Tide . . .*' The list includes various anthologies such as *Poems of Tomorrow* and ends with acknowledgments to the B.B.C. Though Mr. Dyment may be *unaffectedly* arch and babyishly simple, his readers presumably are not. The pleasure they take in his poems cannot be of a healthy kind. A situation which is vicious enough.

Treatment of 'religion' may be *de rigueur* since Hopkins and *Ash-Wednesday*, but since their achievement of sincerity was a matter of such delicate and precarious poise, partial assimilation of both their manners, as in *Sebastian*, has the result that what may have been in Mr. Heppenstall's experience a decent feeling appears in the poems as spiritual grossness. The way in which Hopkins and Eliot are here used to give significance and an air of universality to what is in any case petty and what, from occasional glimpses, appears to be an attitude of mind which would be intensely abhorrent to both Hopkins and Eliot, is fairly common. Common enough, indeed, to lead one to reflect that the way in which the refounders of poetic tradition are being used, so far from leading to a continuation of that tradition, is positively harmful. Unfortunately *Psyche* is such a classic instance of the emasculating effect of conformity to tradition in the academic sense that quotation from it would only embarrass my position. Nevertheless it remains true that instances in modern poetry of healthy assimilation can be found in no more than a handful of poems.

The poets on this list, I would humbly suggest, might provide Mr. Eliot with further examples for his *Primer of Modern Heresy*. At any rate it seems to me that Messrs. Dyment, Heppenstall, and Barker stand in a series of progressive corruption. Mr. Dyment

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is simple and obvious, Mr. Heppenstall is fairly high with a saving silliness ; but Mr. Barker is far more pretentious and toxic than either. Indeed, I imagine that only an Eliot could deal adequately with his case. We are, however, with *Calamiterror*, still moving in the world of fashion. If ' religion ' is one obligatory theme, ' politics ' is another. Even Mr. Dyment, as quoted above, feels bound to include it in his scope. The latest numbers of *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, which has Surrealist sympathies, are in nothing so convincing as their demands for ' Arms for Spain.' Mr. Barker is an even stranger convert. Yet, if I have not mistaken his intention, *Calamiterror* has for its climax the following situation. In the early days of September last, the poet while in Lincolnshire sensed the

> Advent of the extraordinary event, the calamiterror . . .
> The moment of terror flashes . . .
> Revealing the features of the mass as mine.

This was followed on by a vision of W. Blake.

> It was on Sunday the 12th April I saw
> The figure of William Blake bright and huge
> Hung over the Thames at Sonning. I had not had this.
> . . . I had not encountered prototype,

(Though in the light of the account of what was revealed it would have been fairer to have named Mr. Auden or some such figure as the source of enlightenment).

> I achieved apocalypse . . .
> I heard first the Rhondda choral echo up the valley . . .
> And
> I saw in a fog of gas Mr. Baldwin orating . . .

Later he says:

> London lies like a huge rot along the Thames, and Rome
> Roars. O Spain, my golden red, she tears the rot out,
> The Franco gangs that furrow in her heart.

Mr. Barker's political awakening proves no less pitiful than Mr. Spender's in *Vienna*.

Perhaps the political Left will receive the new convert with rejoicing. But for Mr. Barker the interest of the event lies not

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so much in the world outside as in himself. For he claims that he has rid himself of his life-long pre-occupation with himself.

> I feel the bird at my eyelids beating to awaken
> The free and easy fellow in me, him who
> So wide might wander once away from me.

It is all very well for him to announce this news (which if true might lighten the heart of his reviewers), but the whole of the poem gives him the lie. And the shocking thing is that time and time again he shows that he knows it.

In explaining the revelation that was vouchsafed to him he says:

> It is the world that called to me to come
> And I obeyed and left the arbour womb.

Thirty-four out of fifty-three pages are taken up with the theme of himself coming to birth. He embellishes them with morbidly disgusting imagery combined with imagery which is romantic—humanity as the swan whose breast runs like the pelican's red, and a wealth of ' nature ' imagery which is never used precisely and is only defined by being placed in varying contexts with other vague imagery. But for all the violence and profusion nothing of importance is said. Almost any stanza at the conclusion of a professed statement will serve.

> The weeping shell propelled from war
> Drops in a chaos of life and death.
> The leaping babe expelled from womb,
> Dividing the chaos of paradise,
> Ends up in a death dark room.
> The penis shooting metal death
> Explodes the womb of the life room:
> The penis shooting mental life
> Wastes its shell against the tomb.

Mr. Barker, with his talent wants to be in everybody's swim. Little pieces of pastiche from various sources are inserted here and there. Only the trouble with him is that he doesn't want to swim anywhere, or even if he did want, he cannot, as his desire to ' twiddle ' with himself remains as ever overpowering.

H. A. MASON.

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MEDIÆVAL SCOTS POETRY

SCOTTISH POETRY FROM BARBOUR TO JAMES VI (Dent, 7/6).

The assumption I start from in writing about Middle Scots poetry is that it is only when we feel in reading it that it is something as immediate to us as the work of any modern that it really matters to us. But to feel it as if it were modern is to feel it as what it is, and what it is is mediæval poetry. That is, it is quite different in many important respects from modern poetry. To enjoy it, any more than to enjoy any kind of poetry, we cannot be merely passive. There must be some effort on our part to stand outside the changes that with time have taken place in that most important part of our mind which is part of the general mind. We cannot know whether the effort is worth making till we have made it. But the study of poetry is a means to enlarging the scope and correcting the balance of our sympathies. The study of mediæval poetry may help, in particular, to correct the balance in some important respects in which the exclusive study of later poetry will not help.[1]

The poetry I shall be concerned with belongs chiefly to the fifteenth and partly to the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. But it is still mediæval poetry. It has much in common with other mediæval poetry in other European languages. This is the most important fact not only about the Scots poetry but also about the Scotland of the fifteenth century. Europe had a general life and neither Scotland nor its poetry was separate from it. The poetry is the first, and, as I hope may appear, the most valuable, Scots poetry, and, at the same time, late mediæval European poetry.

This poetry has had very little critical attention paid to it, and in coming to it one is forced to acknowledge how much one generally owes even to bad criticism, so long as one recognizes that it is bad. It at least helps one to formulate an approximation to

[1]To take a literary instance: if we come to Shakespeare from as frequent reading of the mediæval poets as we generally do from the reading of the poets since his time, our appreciation of his work might in some respects be different and, perhaps, juster.

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the truth by stimulating one to correct it. The direction what little criticism of Middle Scots poetry there is seems to have taken is towards establishing Chaucer as its sole fountain-head. This seems to me at once an over-simplification of the truth. There is an extraordinary variety in Chaucer but that variety will not account for the extraordinary variety of Middle Scots poetry. It is as independent of Chaucer as was possible for it to be, allowing for the fact that it also is mediæval poetry and that Chaucer was its immediate predecessor. As time went on the separation became greater. There are degrees of separateness from Chaucer in Middle Scots poetry.

'The Kingis Quhair.'

The *Kingis Quhair* is the mediæval Scots poem which is nearest, not merely in the time of its production, but perhaps in itself, to some of the poems of Chaucer. Exactly how far the poem is derivative from them is not so easily determined as may at first seem. Chaucer and the poet of the *Kingis Quhair* had something in common which they shared also with other mediæval poets. It was not merely that they read and learned from the same poems. Their habit of mind was mediæval. It was a habit of mind for which allegory was the natural expression. Our difficulty is to enter into this habit of mind and to understand and appreciate allegorical poetry. The central mediæval poetry is allegorical, which is not the same as saying that the best of the Scots mediæval poetry (which is very late mediæval poetry) is the allegorical ; there are reasons for saying it is not ; but unless it is possible for us to appreciate the allegorical poetry it must remain doubtful whether we really appreciate the other exactly in the right way.

The *Kingis Quhair* cannot be dismissed as a mere conventional exercise in the courtly manner of Chaucer. The following passage, which is remarkably similar to a passage in the *Parlement of Foules* (11.183—203), may help to illustrate some of the ways in which it is equally alive.

> Where in a lusty plain took I my way,
> Endlang a river, pleasant to behold,
> Embrowdin all with freshë flouris gay,
> Where through the gravel, bright as ony gold,
> The crystal water ran so clear and cold,

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That in mine erë made continually
A manner soun mellit with harmony ;

That full of little fishes by the brim,
Now here, now there, with backis blue as lead,
Lap and playit, and in a rout can swim
So prettily, and dressit them to spread
Their coral finnis, as the ruby read,
That in the sun upon ther scales bright
As gesserant ay glitterit in my sight.

And by this ilke riverside alow
Ane hyë-way then fand I like to bene,
On which, on every sidë, a long rawe
Of treis saw I full of leavis green,
That full of fruit delitable were to sene,
And also, as it come into my mind,
Of beastis saw I mony diverse kind.

The landscape is a mythological landscape ; it is not merely decorative. The ' lusty plain,' the ' river,' the ' hyë-way,' the ' treis full of fruit delitable ' are mythological. They belong to that garden which is in the centre of mediæval poetry, and which, if we think of the diversity of bird, beast and fish in it rather, perhaps, than the personifications and gods and goddesses who are also important, is partly the garden of ' kinde.' Bird, beast and fish in it symbolize that intuition of the unity of all kinds of being which seems to have been very strongly present to the mediæval mind but which we have partly lost. In itself it is perhaps pagan, though, of course, it is not necessarily incongruous with the Christianity of the Middle Ages, in that a Christian poet could easily find a place for the garden and all the bird, beast and fish in it in some hierarchy of God's created being. There is no suggestion in the passage of any conflict between what it represents and something outside it.

The clarity and definiteness of the images (' gravel bright as ony gold,' ' crystal water,'[1] ' backis blue as lead,' and in a later

[1] *cf. Roman de la Rose*—Chaucer's translation 1.125, the river

Tho saugh I wel
The botme paved everydel
With gravel ful of stones shene.

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passage, ' turture white as chalk ') is very notable, perhaps because they strictly serve the purposes of a meaning outside themselves and yet paradoxically an inner meaning ; they have some of the externality of the images in the later more simply—yet more elaborately—*pictorial* allegorical poetry in which if there is a meaning it has got separated from the imagery to the disadvantage of both. To put it another way the imagery here has not yet begun to develop independently of the meaning into a rhetorical life of its own.

The same cannot be said of the passage in the *Kingis Quhair* description of the lady. There is more life in the garden than in her ; she is less deeply felt than the leafage of the trees. There is a significant difference also between her and her counterpart the Emelye of the *Knightes Tale*. She isn't Emelye. Emelye springs into life in the same breath with ' the lilie upon his stalke grene,' with ' the rose colour,' with ' the sonne up-riste.' She gathers flowers

To make a sotil gerland for her hede.

Thus, while the description is strictly conventional, it gives that impression of freshness, naturalness and simplicity which is so often noted. But the lady of the *Kingis Quhair* is dissociated from the garden, and, in the description of her, jewels are substituted for flowers. The ' plumis ' on the lady's head are said to be like the ' flowr jonettis ' and others like the ' violettis ' but they are plumes, not, as in the case of Emelye, flowers. The poet speaks of

Beauty eneuch to make a world to dote

but the emphasis is on the lady's ' array,' and in that there is a corruscation of jewels. There is very much jewel imagery also in the fourteenth century *Pearl* (II stanzas VI-X, IV stanzas XVII-XIX, XVII stanzas LXXXIII-LXXXVI) but there it is either in itself symbolical or part of a symbolical landscape ;[1] its purpose is to separate, so that there may be no possibility of confusion, the world of the vision from the ordinary world. But in the *Kingis Quhair* passage the jewel imagery suggests merely the ornament of a princess of a court. It is associated, indeed, with fire:

[1]Some of it is from *Revelations*.

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grete balas lemyng as the fire . . .
About her neck, white as the fyre amaille
A gudely chain of small orfeverye

from which there hung a ruby

That as a spark of lowe so wantonly
Seemit byrning upon her whitë throte

but in other respects it is without symbolical significance. It produces something of the hard glitter of the later fifteenth century rhetoric in the gardens of which the flowers have also turned to jewels. The passage is more ' advanced,' in a not wholly healthy sense, not only than the Chaucer, but also than the first passage. The decay and death of allegory is implicit in it.

ROBERT HENRYSON.

There is nothing of Henryson's with which to compare the *Kingis Quhair* on the one hand or the *Goldyn Targe* on the other. Henryson has no set allegory to correspond with these ; which does not mean that there is no allegorical element in his work. This element is sufficiently important in his work as in the work of all the Middle Scots poets, to justify the keeping of the *Kingis Quhair* in mind when reading as an established background against which to set it. Just as the allegorical habit is more alive in some of the poems of Dunbar other than the set allegories, so the allegorical habit is sufficiently alive in Henryson's work. The *Fables* themselves are a kind of allegory, birds and beasts playing humans, although they do not belong to the *Kingis Quhair* and *Goldyn Targe* line. Perhaps partly because they do not belong to that line there is scarcely anything in the *Fables*, or anywhere else in Henryson, of that rhetoric which has been observed as beginning in the *Kingis Quhair*, and which the allegories in that line were to develop into. He is almost as free from that as Chaucer himself ; and in general he exhibits some of the advantages there may be at certain times in being conservative. It was no doubt due to his being a schoolmaster at Dunfermline, a 'clerk' and not a court poet. But at any rate he is farther from the European centre in his time than other Scots poets of his century, and therefore perhaps in some ways nearer the centre of mediæval poetry as a whole than they. He is correspondingly more ' local ' ; though of course not any-

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thing like so ' local ' as Burns, nor would it have been to his advantage in his time. But to be just as ' local ' as he was did give him certain advantages in certain directions. These particular advantages may be most easily illustrated from the *Fables*, and this is already a criticism of the *Fables*.

The following passage is from *The Swallow and the Other Birds*:

> The samyn season,[1] into ane soft morning,
> Richt blythe that bitter blastis were ago,
> Unto the wood to see the flouris spring,
> And hear the mavis sing and birdis mo,
> I passit forth, syne lookit to and fro,
> To see the soil whilk was richt seasonable,
> Sappie, and to receive all seedis able.
>
> Moving thusgait, great mirth I took in mind,
> Of labouraris to see the business,
> Some makand dyke, and some the pleuch can wynd,
> Some sowand seidis fast from place to place,
> The harrowis hoppand in the sowers' trace:
> It was great joy to him that lavit corn
> To see there labour baith at even and morn.

The joy is a substantial joy ; there is substance in it. It springs from the poet's feeling for the ' business ' of the ' labouraris,' the ' harrowis hoppand,' and the soil ' sappie, and to receive all seedis able.' ' Sappie ' represents an element present also in the *Kingis Quhair* passage as ' lusty ' in ' lusty plain,' and present also to a greater or lesser degree in all Scots mediæval poetry. But in Henryson it is associated with the strenuous activity of the labourers in the poet's own locality.[2] Through his identification

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[1]The season when

> Columbine upkeirkis through the clay.

[2]*cf.* in the same poem (*Fables* stanza 26i):

> The Lint ryipit, the Carll pullit the Lyne,
> Rippillit the bollis, and in beitis set,
> It steipit in the burne, and dryit syne,
> And with ane bittill knokkit it, and bet,
> Syne swingillit weill, and hekkillitt in the flet.

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with a locality the poet secures a fuller and firmer identification with the general life of the earth. It is related to the moral wholesomeness of his work. From a narrower angle it may be said to have imparted an increased wholesomeness to his morality. At any rate the passage implies that his background was not just the late mediæval church.

The description of winter immediately preceding this passage may be taken to illustrate another way in which the poet's ' local ' strength was strength. The poem from which the passages are taken begins on the theme of the nature of God, passes to the planets in their spheres, all creatures in their degrees—expressive of the poet's inner sense of harmony in himself, a harmony everywhere apparent in his work—and passes finally, by an appropriate transition, to the changing seasons, first summer, then autumn. Up to this point what the poet has begun to present is the processional pageant of the seasons well within the mediæval convention. The life in it—

> And Bacchus, God off wyne, renewit hes
> The tunene Pyipis in Italie and France

—is the life rather of Italy and France than Scotland. But with the description of winter there is a change (symbolized by the image with which it is introduced),[1] and this change is brought about by the assertion of the poet's ' locality ' :

> The flouris fair, fadit with frost mon fall,
> And birdis blythe changit their notis sweet
> In still morning, near slain with snaw and sleet.
>
> The dalis deep with dubbis drownit is,
> Baith hill and holt heillit with frostis hair ;
> And boughis bene laifit bare of bliss,
> By wicked windis of the winter wair,
> All wild beastis then from the bentis bare
> Drawis for dread unto their denis deep
> Crouchand for cauld in covis tharme to keep.[2]

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[1] The green garment of summer glorious
Has al to-rent and riven in pieces small.

[2] *cf.* in the same poem, *Fables*, stanza 262.

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The actuality of this points forward to the Douglas *Prologues*.

It may also be partly because he is more 'local' than other Scots poets of his century that Henryson is also on the whole more popular than they. I do not mean that his work represents a 'popular' development away from the 'literary.' In his work the 'popular' and the 'literary' are not separated, and certainly in so sense beginning to lose touch with each other. It was much later that the 'popular' elements in Scots poetry were to develop independently of the 'literary.'[1] Neither do I mean that Henryson draws *more* upon the more 'popular' element in the language than, for example, Dunbar. It is part of Henryson's strength, of course, as it is part of the strength of Dunbar, Douglas, Lyndsay, that they draw—in some poems much more than in others, but on the whole very considerably—upon the 'popular' element in the language, and frequently in association with the native—native also to the language—alliterative, assonantal tradition, as, for example, in the description of winter above. *Sum Practysis of Medecyne* is Henryson's complete comic contribution to this tradition:

> Sevin sobbis of ane selche, the quhidder of ane quhaill,
> The lug of ane lempet is nocht to forsaik,
> The harnis of ane haddock, hakkit or haill,
> With ane bushful of blude of the scho bak,
> With ane brewing caldrun full of hait caill,
> For it wilbe the softar and sweitter of the smak.

'Smak' concentrates the pungent flavour of that.[2] But Henryson's command of the 'popular' element in the language is not more remarkable than Dunbar's. The difference between them, by virtue of which the one may be said to be more 'popular' than the other, is in how and why each uses this 'popular' element.

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[1]Until you have, on the one hand, *Christis Kirk* and *Peblis at the Play*, and, on the other, Drummond of Hawthornden, who is not only without popular contact, but is not Scots at all in his work.

[2]*cf.* 'Make the gruel thick and *slab*' (*Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene i). The ingredients of Shakespeare's witches' caldron are obviously drawn from a similar source in 'folk' speech.

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Henryson uses it in general (I think particularly of the *Fables*) quite naturally because of his partial identity in his work with the peasant people from whose speech it derives. His use of it is to that extent less ' literary ' than Dunbar's. Dunbar's use is more inclined to virtuosity ; his feeling for its raciness and vigour leads him deliberately, if delightedly, to see what he can do with it for comic and other purposes of his own.

The difference is reflected in the quality of their humour. Dunbar's humour is of many varieties, but though he makes brilliant use of ' folk ' speech it is never quite simply ' folk ' humour. Henryson's humour (I think again of the *Fables*) is characteristically ' folk ' humour. A fox[1] stretches himself out on the roadway, ' the white turnit up of his ene,' ' his toung out hung.' A cadgar ' comes carpand with capill and with crulis ' and finds him to all appearances dead.

> He lap about full lichtly where he lay,
> And all the truce he trippit on his tais ;
> As he had heard ane piper play, he gais.
>
> ' Here lyis,' quod he, ' the devil deid in a dyke.
> Sic ane selcouth saw I not this seven year ;
> I trow ye have been tussillit with some tyke,
> That garris you lie sa still withouten steir:
> Sir fox, in faith, ye are dear welcome here ;
> It is some wifis malison, I trow,
> For poultry pyking, that lightit has on you.
>
> ' There sall na pedder, for purse, nor yet for glovis,
> Nor yet for pointis pyke your pellit fra me ;
> I sall of it mak mittenis to my loofis,
> Till hald my handis hait, wherever Ibe.
> Till Flanderis sall it never sail the sea.'
> With that in hy, he hint him by the heelis,
> And with ane swak he swang him on the creelis.

The comic zest of that, the animal high spirits, is inherent in the language. The language shares the delighted physical energy of those whose speech it originally was—' he trippit on his tais ; as

[1] *The Fox, the Wolf, and the Cadgar.*

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he had heard ane piper play '—' with ane swak he swang him.' The humour is correspondingly broad, as, again, in the farcical end of *The Fox and the Wolf*. The fox has taken a kid, and because it is Lent[1]—

> He dowkit him, and till him can he sayne:
> ' Ga doun, Schir Kid, cum up Schir Salmond agane!'
> Quhill he wes deid ; syne to the land him drewch,
> And off that new maid Salmond eit anewech.

When he has eaten his fill he lies on his back

> Straikand his wame aganis the sonis heit

and himself remarks

> ' Upon this wame set wer ane bolt full meit.'

Thus, when the keeper's arrow unexpectedly pins him to the earth, it is something more than poetic justice which is satisfied. Henryson's moral preoccupation doesn't so much as might be expected interfere with his humorous observation. In the *Two Mice*, for example, it provides little more than shrewd marginal comment. But sometimes it introduces a certain asperity which sounds personal:

> He fand ane Jolie Jasp, richt precious,
> Wes castin furth in sweping of the hous.
> As Damisellis Wantoun and Insolent,
> That fane wald play, and on the streit be sene,
> To swoping of the hous thay tak na tent,
> Thay cair na thing, swa that the flure be clene.[2]

Henryson has been commended for his 'humanity.' The word by itself nowadays means too much to mean anything much. But if the meaning is that it is the human which Henryson sees in the animal it is a just criticism. It is not the otherness of the animals which attracts his attention ; it is their human resemblances. The interest in the *Fables* is (if I may separate the phrase from its

[1] In *The Fox, the Wolf and the Cadgar* the fox also explains, it being Lent, ' I can nocht fische, ffor weiting of my feitt.'
[2] *The Cok and the Jasp*.

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vulgarized use) a human interest. It does not occur to the mediæval poet to see their life as not one with ours.[1]

> The swet sesoun provokit us to dance.[2]

They are animated by the same instincts as humans. The uplandis mous and the burges mous know each other's voices ' as kinnisman will do, by verray kind ' ; and when they meet

> . . . grit kyndnes wes schawin thame betwene
> For quhyles thay leuch, and quhylis for joy thay gret
> Quhyles kissit sweit, quhylis in armis plet.

The two mice are surrounded with much domestic detail which also helps to identify them with common humanity. But in the *Two Mice* and in the opening of the *Paddock and the Mous* there is at the same time a delicate appreciation of the littleness of these creatures as such.

> Ane lytill Mous come till ane Revir syde ;
> Scho micht not waid, hir schankis were sa schort,
> Scho culd not swym, scho had na hors to ryde:
> Of verray force behovit hir to byde,
> And to and ffra besyde that Revir deip
> Scho ran, cryand with mony pietuous peip.
>
> ' Help over, help over,' this silie Mous can cry,
> ' For Goddis lufe, sum bodie over the brym.'
> (With that ane Paddock, in the watter by,
> Put up hir heid . . .)[3]
> ' Seis thow,' quod sho, ' off corne yone Jolie flat,
> Off ryip Aitis, off Barlie, Peis and Quheit?
> I am hungrie, and fane wald be thair at,
> But I am stoppit be this watter greit.'

---

[1]There is reproduced in Mr. Harvey Wood's edition before me a picture of the moralising cock from an early edition of the *Fables*. It looks unmistakably human. The artist need not have been endeavouring to interpret Henryson. He probably still shared in the sixteenth century something of that perception of the mediæval poet.

[2]*The Lion and the Mouse.*

[3]Brackets mine.

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The ' schort schankis ' and the ' pietuous peip ' of the distressed creature suggest the mouse characteristics. ' Scho had no horse to ryde ' shows that she is at the same time as human as her kindred ' in armis plet ' in the previous passage. (Burns was not the first to have this sort of feeling for mice, though his poem, coming when it did, has perhaps provided the handiest excuse for the sentimentalisation of it). She sees ' the Jolie flat.' But the river provides a gigantic obstacle:

> But I am stoppit be this watter greit.

(The Spenser with his keyis and Gib our cat are similarly gigantic intruders in the *Two Mice*). The ' seliness ' and ' brukkilness ' of these creatures are at the same time the ' seliness and ' brukkilness ' of humanity. The birds and beasts of the *Fables* retain just sufficient of the bird and beast characteristics to enliven them in their roles in the human tragi-comedy.

Not all of the *Fables* re-do Aesop ; some of them belong to the Reynard cycle ; there is no other version extant of the *Fox, the Wolf and the Cadgar*. But they belong as a whole to the great ' popular ' tradition of mediæval Europe. There are places in them (as in the *Prologue to the Lion and the Mouse*) where Henryson is more ' literary ' than ' popular.' But in general where, for example, he comes near to Chaucer it is to the ' popular ' Chaucer. Some of the beast conversation in the *Trial of the Fox* is obviously from the same source of *fabliau* tradition as the debate between the birds in the *Parlement of Foules*. The wolf's head is bloody from the mare's kick. The fox answers the Lion King and Judge's question:

> ' My Lord, speir not at me!
> Speir at your Doctour off Divinitie,
> With his reid Cap can teel you weill aneuch,'
> With that the Lyoun, and all the laif thay leuch.

and so to the sudden change of tone in

> Swa come the yow, the Mother of the Lam

—the lamb murdered by the fox. But though there is in the poem (stanza 125) a touch of heraldic imagery there is nothing of the

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splendid thing that Chaucer brought from Italian poetry into the *Parlement of Foules* (II, 230-280).

The comparison between the *Cock and the Fox* and Chaucer's version of the same (Nonne Preestes Tale) brings out Henryson's limitations. The conversations between the cock and the fox (*Fables* stanzas 64-67) and between the cock's three wives, Pertol, Sprutok, and Toppok (71-77) are excellent comedy. But the humour is not equal to the sophisticated humour of Chaucer. Henryson does not compass, as Chaucer does, the fullness of burlesque and mock heroic ; nor is there the equivalent of Chaucer's appreciation of the comic absurdity of an erudite cock. There are not the varieties of comedy in the *Cock and the Fox* there are in the *Nonne Preestes Tale*. But of course, there are many elements, mostly ' popular ' elements (' How! berk, Berrie, Bawsie Broun ') in common.

The *Testament of Cresseid* is perhaps less ' popular ' than the *Fables*. But neither is there the profound sophistication of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in it. The attitude is that simply of a serious good man. Nevertheless, though much lesser than the *Troilus*, the *Testament* is in its different way a very great poem. The opening passage alone is one of the hugest things in Middle Scots poetry. The grave, wise attitude it represents is that of the whole poem. The tone is a quiet elderly tone. The poet begins by carefully finding his bearings, the season of the year, the positions of the heavenly bodies, Venus in opposition to ' Phœbus, direct descending doun.'

> Shouris of hail can fra the north descend,
> That scantly fra the cauld I micht defend.

There is again, in the appreciation of the ' cauld,' the actuality that has already been noted.

> The northern wind had purifyit the air,
> And shed the misty cloudis fra the sky ;
> The frost freezit, the blastis bitterly
> Fra Pole Arctic come whistling loud and schill
> And causit me remove aganis my will.

The wind that has ' purifyit ' the air is ' fra Pole Arctic.' Does that mean anything more than it says? What follows makes it

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plain that it is more than the cold of winter he seeks shelter from. He has ' traisted ' that Venus his ' fadit heart of luve she wald mak green.'

> But for great cauld as then I lattit was,
> And in my chalmer to the fire can pass.
> Though luve be hait, yet in ane man of age
> It kindillis nocht sa soon as in youtheid,
> Of whom the blood is flowing in ane rage,
> And in the auld the courage doif and deid,
> Of whilk the fire outward is best remeid:
> To help by physic, whare that nature failit,
>
> I am expert—for baith I have assailit.
> I mend the fire, and beikit me about,
> Then took ane drink my spreitis to comfort,
> And armit me weill fra the cauld thereout ;
> To cut the winter richt and mak it short
> I took ane quair, and left all other sport.

The clue to the double significance is that ' fire outward.' It implies the fire inward which is not there. The change from the outer cold to the inner cold—' in ane man of age ' love ' kindillis nocht '—and again the change from the lack of the fire in the blood to the ' fire outward ' is what enlarges the significance of the whole passage.

The poem does what it does at a considerable pressure. There is not that easy tone of amused observation and at the same time understanding sympathy there is in the *Troilus*. The *Testament* is much more narrowly concentrated than Chaucer's in more than one sense large poem. The moral horror at the ' uncleanness ' of the ' fleshly lusts ' that have ' changed in filth ' Cresseid's ' feminitie ' merges into the purely physical horror of the ' uncleanness ' of the leprosy that devours her beauty and youth. When the ' Court and Convocation ' that inflicts the ' poetic justice ' has

> Vanishit away ; then raise she up and took
> Ane poleist glass, and her shadow culd look ;
> And when she saw her face sa deformait,
> Gif she in heart was woe aneuch, God wait.

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The relentlessness of that is representative. The effect there and in other places is due to a certain bareness of statement. The statements are often felt to be understatements. When her ' auld ' father ' lookit on her ugly leper face ' there is ' care aneuch betwix them twain.' Again that ' aneuch.' He ' deliverit her in at the spittail house.' ' Deliverit ' suggests a thing no longer of human worth ; the spital house is ' at the tounis end.' It points forward to the perfunctoriness of ' syne buryit her withouten tarrying ' and the poignant laconic brevity of the epitaph on the marble tomb.

> Lo fair Ladyis, Cresseid, of Troyis Toun,
> Sumtyne countit the flour of Womanheid,
> Under this stane, lait Lipper, lyis deid.

The poem works by concentration, compression. The pity is concentrated in the final meeting between Troilus and Cresseid in which though ' not ane another knew '

> . . . with ane blenk it came into hir thocht
> That he, sometime her face before had sene.

But in two passages Henryson does allow himself a certain ' literary ' expressiveness. The first of these is the pageant of the Ancient Gods ; the second the Complaint of Cresseid. The Ancient Gods descend out of their planets when Cupid rings the silver bell.

> Whilk men micht hear fra heaven unto hell.

A close comparison between the passage and Chaucer's description of the Temple of Mars in the *Knightes Tale* (II, 1117-1192) and of Saturn (II, 1598-1611) only emphasizes the difference between the two. The *Knightes Tale* passages (especially II, 1137-1145) are a poignant series of sharp realizations of the tragedy and horror throughout the world ; which incidentally suggests that the account of Chaucer in general acceptance requires to be considerably stretched. The *Testament* passage exhibits quite another kind of strength. The following is Henryson's Saturn.

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His face frosnit, his lire was like the leid ;
His teeth chatterit, and cheverit with the chin ;
His ene drowpit, how, sunken in his heid ;
Out of his nose the mildrop fast can rin ;
With lippis blae, and cheekis lean and thin ;
The ice-schoklis that fra his hair down hang
Was wonder great, and as ane spear as lang.

Atour his belt his lyart lockis lay
Felterit, unfair, ourfret with frostis hoar,
His garmont and gyis full gay of gray,
His witherit weed fra him the wind outwore ;
Ane busteous bow within his hand he bore,
Under his girdle ane flasche of felloun flanis,
Featherit with ice, and heidit with hailstanis.

The alliterative element, present so strongly in the Henryson and scarcely at all in the Chaucer, helps to give that its thew and sinew. But, perhaps because of that particular kind of robustness, that toughness, it is without the poignancy of the Chaucer, more of a ' literary ' *tour-de-force*. It is perhaps significant that what Henryson pictures is the god Saturn, then in a procession Jupiter, Mars, Phœbus, Venus, Mercury,[1] Cynthia. Chaucer sees ' the sowe freten the child right in the cradel.' What Henryson sees again is the god Mars ' *like* to ane boar whetting his tuskis keen.' The passage is, so far as I know, the first example in Scots of a mode that persisted well into the sixteenth century. But Sackville's *Induction* has not the concreteness (' heidit with hailstanis ') and definiteness of the Henryson.

The Complaint of Cresseid is a completely mediæval ' complaint ' on the mutability theme. ' Fairness ' is ' bot ane fading flour ' and ' all wealth in eird away as wind it weiris.' The much celebrated garden itself

[1]Apart from the Saturn and the Mars, the Venus and the Mercury are perhaps the most interesting. The figure of the physician (here Mercury) seems to have had some important significance for the late mediæval imagination. It recurs.

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Whare thou was wont full merrily in May
To walk and tak the dew be it was day,
To hear the merle and mavis mony ane,
With ladies fair in carolling to gane

is subject to the law of transitoriness:

All is decayit, thy weird is welterit so.

In the midst of this what might be described as the literalness, though it is at the same time not the less metaphorical, of

And for thy bed tak now ane bunch of stro

together with the ' mowlit bread ' and the ' cider sour,' brings us up sharp against the actuality of Cresseid's present condition. That the ' complaint ' is in some measure felt to be itself vanity becomes explicit not only in the words but in the movement of the rebuke of the leper woman who recalls Cresseid to herself.

And said, ' Why spurnis thou against the wall,
To slay thyself, and mend nothing at all.'

There is nothing for it but the acceptance of fate however hard:

Ga leir to clap thy clapper to and fro,
And leir after the law of leper leid.

The reiterated ' clap thy clapper to and fro ' introduces again the relentlessness already referred to.

If the *Testament* is less 'popular' than the *Fables*, the *Orpheus and Eurydice* is less ' popular ' still. Yet on inspection of the descent of Orpheus in the last-named poem it becomes plain that if it is less ' popular ' than the *Fables* it is not through any omission of the ' popular ' but its absorption into something less simple and more important. The descent of Orpheus already foreshadows Douglas's *Aeneid* as something possible to Middle Scots poetry. It is certain from his reference to it that Douglas had read Henryson's poem, but, of course, he need not have ; the descent of Aeneas was in any case well within his resource as a Middle Scots poet. The Henryson begins by telling how Orpheus took his way

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To seek his wife attour the grovis gray,
Hungry and cauld, with mony wilsum wane,
Withouten guide, he and his harp alane.

There is a finality about that which is characteristic of the whole passage. There is the sureness and certainty of the master, the strict economy, the exact proportioning of means to ends. Yet the achievement does not involve the sacrifice of the 'popular.' The 'popular'[1] is represented by those 'wonders' and 'marvels' which Orpheus is confronted with on his adventurous journey. We remember the popularity in the Middle Ages of fantastic stories of travel.

Then come he till a river wonder deep
Oure it a brig, and on it sisters three.

Orpheus 'playit a joly spring' and the three sisters, Alecto, Megera, and Tisiphone were subdued. That 'playit a joly spring' represents again the presence of the 'popular,' which is here also the 'Scots,' element. The incident of Tantalus will illustrate it more fully.

Syne come he til a wonder grisly flood
Drubly and deep, that rathly down can rin,
Where Tantalus makit full thirsty stood,
And yet the water yede above his chin;
Though he gapit, thare wald no drop come in;
When he duckit the water wald descend;
Thus gat he nocht his thirst to slake nor mend.

Before his face ane apple hang also
Fast at his mouth upon a tolter thread;
When he gapit, it rockit to and fro,
And fled, as it refusit him to feed.
Then Orpheus had ruth of his great need,
Took out his harp and fast on it can clink
The water stood, and Tantalus gat drink.

---

[1]Is it an accident that the line

Far, and full far, and farther than I can tell

might be a line from the Ballads?

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The rime on ' clink . . . drink ' marks the continued presence of the ' playit a joly spring ' element, while at the same time emphasizing the finality. The passage is ' Scots ' of course in so far as the language (' gapit ' ' duckit ' ' rockit ') is ' Scots.' The topography of Hell is correspondingly related to that of Scotland:

> Syne our a muir, with thornis thick and sharp.

By these means Henryson realizes the Greek theme anew as a Scots poet and not without humour. When Orpheus remarks that Eurydice is pale, Pluto answers

> She faris as weill daily as does myself

and adds wisely

> Were she at hame in her countree of Thrace

she would soon be her former self again. But this element does not subtract from the dignity and impressiveness of the whole. There is in particular the grandeur and solemnity of the very mediæval enumeration of the past great ones of the Earth whom Orpheus sees in Hell ; it is not Dante, of course, but it is as mediæval as Dante:

> There fand he many careful king and queen.

Not only famous Greeks and Romans, but also Biblical kings and queens:

> There saw he Pharaoh, for the oppression
> Of Godis folk, on whilk the plaguis fell

and

> There saw he mony paip and cardinal.

Dunbar's variation on the same late mediæval theme is in the *Lament for the Makars*.

> Unto the deid goes all estatis
> Princis, prelatis, and potestatis.

At last, after the kings and popes, he sees Eurydice

> Lean and deidlike, piteous and pale of hue
> Richt wershe and wan, and wallowit as a weed
> Her lily lire was like unto the leid.

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The gloomy splendour and solemnity of the enumeration emphasizes by its accumulated massiveness and forlornness (if I may use the word apart from its Keatsian associations) of Eurydice. It takes the colour out of her.

The descent of Orpheus, though it concludes on a variation on the most solemn of late mediæval themes is as a whole a mediæval variation (as the *Testament* also is) on a Greek theme ; and not only mediæval but Scots and not only Scots but (perhaps even more completely than the *Testament*) European ; and it is all these without being any the less one of them and without being any the less one.

JOHN SPEIRS.

NOTE.—The text I have generally used is Mr. Gray's. In the case of poems not in Mr. Gray's book, I have used Mr. Harvey Wood's edition of Henryson.

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DETACHMENT FROM SOCIAL NORMS

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL NORMS, by Muzafer Sherif (Harper and Brothers, 1936, 8/6 net).

There are some ideas, the truth of which no one questions, which seem to require re-stating periodically; partly perhaps because they invite phrasing in more fashionable terms, but more than that because people re-awaken from time to time to the enormous significance of some simple notion that they have always known, but known just as an irrefutable and commonplace truth. Then they are overwhelmed and write new books which are hungrily received. The truth that has lately been sloughing its skin is that individual people are moulded by the social group they grow up within. Several anthropologists have been working over their material again and re-presenting it with this in view, and Dr. Sherif's book focusses the same concern among psychologists. I shouldn't wish to suggest that they add nothing new to the familiar ideas they once again explore, but an air of excitement and self-amazement that touches their writing suggests that in this respect they are the safety valves of some social afflatus, and that like their audience they feel more significant pressures behind what they say than the detached onlooker can when he inquires what in fact they have added to the body of common knowledge.

Dr. Sherif has given the familiar theme a fashionable re-statement in terms of the Gestalt theory, and in line with this choice has concerned himself chiefly with the effect on the individual's perceptual processes of socially given standards and expectations. An ingeniously contrived experiment of his own demonstrates afresh the fact that one person's statement as to what he sees will influence what another sees.

As far as our appreciation of the topic develops at all under Dr. Sherif's treatment we owe it to a shift and subtler placing of emphasis which he achieves through his newer theoretical approach. Earlier work (for instance Trotter's discussion in *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War*, 1916, and no end of experiment on suggestion) was preoccupied with the *distortion* which individual judgment suffered through social influences: in Trotter's conception

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of the individual's ' resistance ' to his direct experience, in favour of socially given preconceptions, there may lurk the naïvety of supposing that ' pure ' individual experience, uncontaminated socially, could ever be found. Dr. Sherif, on the other hand, instead of regarding the social context as a source of contamination, insists on it as a necessary condition of every judgment, cohering with the judgment as inevitably and as intimately as the physical context coheres with objects we perceive.

This brings him momentarily face to face with a difficulty he shies away from. Social psychologists, he points out, are bound like everyone else to observe and judge within frames of reference, and in relation to standards, assimilated from their social group. If the group they have to observe is their own, how then can they achieve sufficient freedom from its preconceptions to become aware of them and if necessary discount them? Dr. Sherif offers only one suggestion—that they should become acquainted with the frames of reference of other groups and play off those against their own ; the only contrasting groups he speaks of are primitive peoples, and the only level of experience he is concerned about is that of rather simple perceptual judgment. Thus, like so many psychologists, he manages by concentrating on what is fundamental to avoid what is important.

He merely leaves us with the suspicion that in handling more complex forms of experience most psychologists will probably do little more than elaborate, and perhaps rationalize, the current beliefs of their society. And one wonders whether this is bound to be so, or whether social psychology, remaining scientific and avoiding propaganda, could yet give the kind of understanding that invites question and not just the explanation that puts beyond question whatever seems for the time being necessary and fundamental to society. From what standpoints can the psychologist gain some degree of detachment?

Anthropologists and historians have the materials for a significant contrast with their own social group, but they can use them only if they manage to see them through other eyes than the average member of their society could ; they indeed might as legitimately ask for the psychologist's help in achieving detachment as he for theirs. No material in itself can open our eyes to anything. Those historians and anthropologists who have used their

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material to gain more insight into their own society have done so because they have, as people, been capable of criticism—have, in Trotter's terms, been less resistive than most to experience that they have not been primed to expect.

For those willing and able to be critical the opportunities exist close at hand, in the wide diversity of character and culture that still occurs in what may seem an increasingly standardized society. If a man is different his difference is no less valuable, as an invitation to critical plasticity, because he is one in a million than it would be if he were one in a hundred. But to most psychology he is negligible if he is one in a million, a mere error of sampling ; he won't affect the second place of decimals in a correlation coefficient. It seems as if modern standardization, in contrast to the rather close uniformity found within primitive groups, has taken the form of enormously multiplying what is average or modal, and has probably (the view is at least arguable) not reduced, and may even have increased, the range and absolute number of deviations from it. Proportionately the number of deviant kinds of life is much smaller, so small that if we focus our attention on the average—as psychology does—nothing will disturb us. But if we choose to attend to them—as psychology could—they are as significant as ever and seriously disturb our view of the average when we look back at it. The average man is a bundle of truncated possibilities, and a psychology that aimed at developing its significance for culture would attend much less to him and much more to the artist, criminal, saint, lunatic, mystic, revolutionary, or hermit that he might have become and hasn't. There is very little psychology of the human possibilities, and the psychology we have, therefore, is not likely to encourage detachment from what is current and established.

D.W.H.

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ORPHEUS BRITANNICUS

PURCELL, by J. A. Westrup. The Master Musicians, ed. Eric Blom (Dent, 4/6).

Purcell's name has always been a legend in England, even when his works have been little performed. It is surprising, therefore, that there has until now been no concise book giving the full details of his biography and a helpful guide to his works, although there have been several studies of more limited range. Mr. Westrup has at last supplied that need by an addition to the series capably directed by Eric Blom. He has illumined some of the dark corners of Purcell's life and provided some suggestive brief criticism of the significant aspects of Purcell's genius. It is a careful and readable book that should send many to the Purcell Society's edition of the composer and stimulate others to increase the number of works available in accessible modern reprints. The necessarily slight references to a large number of particular compositions are full of invitation to further acquaintance, and the quotations with which the criticism is supported full of interest to the general reader. Both help to place Purcell correctly among his contemporaries and in the history of music as a whole.

The chief emphasis of the book sensibly moderates many rash judgments that have done Purcell the disservice of exalting him for the wrong reasons. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries he received a nostalgic homage as the last English composer of the first rank and the particular glory of an otherwise unmusical nation. The opinion is the more dangerous because it contains an element of truth. Purcell was in one sense the culmination of English musical effort. His personality could have occurred only at one particular time and in one particular environment. All great works of art owe something to the society in which they are produced ; and Purcell's generation inherited a long tradition of popular musical culture. He could fall into the idiom of this tradition (as in the harvest song in King Arthur or the tune from The Mock Marriage quoted by Mr. Westrup on p. 156) without any feeling of disharmony with the other elements of his style: there was no trace of condescension, as there was when Handel stooped below the aristocratic cosmopolitanism of

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Italian opera and chamber music. England had also a deep-rooted tradition of amateur performance among the educated classes. The rounds, catches and ballads testify to the social popularity of singing that Purcell shared with them. On its more serious side this amateur tradition linked the string fantasias with the Elizabethan contrapuntal composers: the appeal is to players rather than listeners. The early church music, too, shows that Purcell inherited a considerable tradition of peculiarly English devotional music, broken as its career had been by the Commonwealth. The dramatic music and the odes do little more than maintain and extend the aristocratic and courtly interest in music as part of formal occasions and spectacles, which had encouraged English composers since the days of the Tudors. There is, indeed, evidence in every aspect of Purcell's work of a continuity with living tradition.

Another peculiarly English feature for which Purcell has received just commendation has been the extraordinary felicity of his setting of English words. This again is not only a test of individual genius but a sign that English verse had maintained long associations with music. The development of poetic style had never left musical structure behind, as it did after the seventeenth century, until an English-speaking melody was rediscovered by Vaughan Williams. Handel was not above copying the mechanical secrets of Purcell's declamation, but he never spoke the language like a native.[1] Addison and the eighteenth century 'agree with our *English* Musicians, in admiring Purcell's Compositions, and thinking his tunes so wonderfully adapted to his words' (*Spectator*, No. 29), and the modern critic turns back with delight to Purcell, after a century of English singing with an Italian accent and another of English singing with a German accent.

Nevertheless, as Mr. Westrup insists, Purcell is by no means a purely English composer. That he held his position throughout the eighteenth century was due largely to his preparing the way for the Italian conquest. He expressly declared his belief that in our own country 'Musick is yet but in its Nonage, a forward Child, which gives hope of what it may be hereafter in *England*, when the Masters of it shall find more encouragement. 'Tis now learning *Italian*, which is its best Master, and studying a little

[1]For a discussion of this, see H. C. Colles, *Voice and Verse*.

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of the *French* Air, to give it somewhat more of Gayety and Fashion. Thus being farther from the Sun, we are of later Growth than our Neighbour Countries, and must be content to shake off our Barbarity by degrees. The present Age seems already dispos'd to be refin'd, and to distinguish betwixt wild Fancy, and a just, numerous Composition.' (p. 69). The tone of this preface at once invites a comparison with the position of his collaborator, Dryden, in the history of literature, reading French for Italian at the appropriate places. Both were striving to refine what they considered the barbarity and looseness of the tradition they inherited ; Augustan clarity is the goal of both. Behind both are the same intellectual and social changes. Dryden shows them in the regularizing of the couplet and the increased abstractness of his vocabulary ; Purcell in ' the strengthening of the feeling for tonality, with the consequent simplification—as it seems to us—of the harmonic texture, and the growth of a stronger, purer melodic invention.' (Mr. Westrup, p. 255).

The direction of the development can be seen by comparing the early with the later works of each artist. To explain the inner motives of it would involve reference to the conversation and interests of Charles II's court and the social position of the artist ; but, to confine oneself to musical manifestations of the temper of the time, one may notice that music centred more and more in public places, the opera-house and the concert hall: even church music almost became a branch of opera when Charles II brought the French manner with him. The amateur too began to give way before the professional ; music was produced for listeners rather than performers. Clear structure was an obvious result of the growth of public concerts, to which Mr. Westrup has devoted a suggestive chapter (Chapter VIII).

Purcell's intrinsic value is not to be separated from his historical position. He lived in a civilization that provided a base for the work he built, a well of melody and emotional expression from which he could draw. But only one of absolute genius could have so used what his environment provided. He is the most professional of musicians, and there is no technical device of which he is not master ; but at his best the technique is strictly subordinated to the content. His melodic fertility and propriety is almost unequalled. His tunes are never the slaves of his words: they

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are in the truest sense married to them. His harmony and counterpoint never obtrude ; each detail must be seen in relation to the whole. His best work is all infused with the quality of a first-rate individuality. As Hopkins said:

> ' It is the forgèd feature finds me ; it is the rehearsal
> Of own, of abrupt self there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.'

BRUCE PATTISON.

NEW ENGLAND CULTURE

THE FLOWERING OF NEW ENGLAND : A Literary History, 1815-1865, by Van Wyck Brooks (J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 15/- net).

> ' The Civil War brought to a head, however inconclusively, a phase of American culture that later times described as the New England " renaissance " . . . Whether this impulse was a " renaissance " or only an " Indian summer," as Mr. Santayana has called it, " a golden age," or a " golden day," the impulse existed and the movement was real. The question is only one of its general meaning and of what it signified in itself.'

Although Mr. Brooks begins his last chapter by these sentences, with which everyone can agree, it does seem that questions of ' general meaning ' and of ' what it signified in itself ' are exactly what the rest of the book lacks, however entertaining and complete it may be, and that it certainly is ; the fact is the more surprising because in his earlier *Ordeal of Mark Twain* he employed general ideas, about the function of humour, for instance, or the effects of a dilute Puritan tradition upon a writer, in such a way as really to throw new light on the subject. In dealing with New England, however, he goes along the usual highway, though more charming and more thorough than most, and leaves one with the feeling that there was a very large proportion of mere fondness in the combustible mixture which propelled him. After the passage quoted above he brings in Spengler's theory of inevitable rise and fall, as an ' explanation ' of the culture he is talking about, and although it probably fits, the garment does not seem a very interest-

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ing one. The general effect of his presentation is tacitly to exaggerate the achievements of New England, especially the literary ones, and also, although the facts are there, in great but not ungainly variety, Mr. Brooks himself does not go into the questions which they pose.

He takes the year 1815, when the second war with Great Britain was concluded, as the starting point of the ' impulse,' and has three or four very good chapters about the temper of New England at that time, giving special emphasis to those more liberal aspects of its life which are not commonly known. The region, to begin with, was wealthy ; an increasing number of factories were replacing the shipping trade which had been ruined during the war ; farming was apparently profitable ; and despite the inequalities, wealth—or at least decent means—were fairly widely distributed, so that one could say with some justice that a man was poor only through his own fault. There seems to have been a certain leaven of the more expansive type of eighteenth century gentleman, 'flushed with wine and generosity,' with a taste for elegant living, while there was another strain of the ' lean, shrewd, nervous Yankee type, cautious, with a turn for metaphysics, dried by the American atmosphere.' Whatever the degree of floridity, however, the old Puritan days of Cotton Mather had been forgotten for a long time in the towns, and in the ' mansion houses ' throughout the countryside ; the relaxation is typified by the change from Calvinism to Unitarianism (called ' the Boston religion ') and the consequent displacement of the fire-and-brimstone sermon by one dealing melodiously with the interests of daily life. The most popular preacher in Boston once said of Milton that his eyes had been ' quenched in the service of a vulgar and usurping faction.' ' The vandal spirit of Puritanism ' was a common expression.

Respect for principle and conscience, of course, was carried over, but it now found its expression in the ' principles ' of Dr. Johnson and Burke, who together with Plutarch and Pope (the *Homer*) were standard reading, and to a lesser extent Fielding and Smollett as well. Blackstone was much in evidence, for the merchants and manufacturers were of course conservative, and found him a convenient ' arsenal of logic against the Jacobins and their bob-tailed crew.' Conscience and principle had not only

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a modifying influence upon the pursuit of wealth, so that, as Dickens said, the golden calf worshipped in Boston was ' a mere pygmy ' in comparison with that of other parts, but also these qualities constituted a part of the bond of sympathy which existed between town and country ; for despite the greater sombreness of the outlying districts, whose people had held to Calvinism and were still nourished on *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Lives of the Martyrs*, they were none the less on fairly comfortable speaking terms with the urban elements, at least down to the eve of the Civil War, when they divided over the question of Abolition, the townsmen opposing it because of their dependence on a supply of Southern cotton while the country folk turned their practiced Puritan fire to its support. Mr. Brooks is careful to emphasize the aplomb of the American of that day in his dealings with foreigners ; imitiative in literature, the American was sure of himself and of his values in every other respect ; the scholar Ticknor, in Rome during his triumphal Grand Tour, ' might have joined six cardinals at whist, if a Boston man could have played on a Sunday evening.'

With the confidence which came of having gone so far in practical and moral matters the New Englanders were now ready to cultivate themselves. W. E. Channing ' ceaselessly preached the gospel of self-improvement. ' We want minds,' he said, ' to be formed among us. We want the human intellect to do its utmost here.'' ' They were consciously and specifically out to have a culture as good as any of the historical models: it is a curious phenomenon and probably unique to New England ; it certainly had its effect on the result. The pursuit of culture was, naturally, undertaken with the same means that had already worked so well in other spheres—will, conscientiousness, and industry—and directed by their own aptitudes as well as by the prevailing interest of Europe at that time, they turned to scholarship as the proper beginning. Ticknor returned from his trip with one of the largest private libraries then known and set to work to revivify Harvard College. Results were rapid and astounding ; learning became everyone's right and duty, respected by wealthy and humble alike. Girls in the textile factories knew *Paradise Lost* by heart and went to German classes ; the Harvard hall-porter could quote Virgil by the page ; people told stories of prowess in learning just as

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lumber-jacks would relate feats of strength. After having conquered the usual languages one went on to Coptic, Chaldaic or Ethiopic. One effect of all this erudition was to prepare a public for the well-documented historians who were soon to appear, notably Prescott and Motley, and to turn the attention of lesser literary talents to the writing of history, for which excellent libraries existed as well as the market. But the aridity of most of it—Mr. Brooks does not seem much struck by it despite his own evidence—was extraordinary. There seemed to be nothing going on beneath the learned surface. The same discipline and strength of will which enabled the whole country to become so erudite in the space of ten years or less, quashed any transforming originality. Mr. Brooks speaks of the learning of Florence at the beginning of the Renaissance ; but learning for the Florentines served not only to illuminate and define their own nature, in that nature also were vital needs which transmuted the learning into something new. Perhaps New England succeeded too well in doing what she set out to do, to have a culture, poets, historians and the rest, who would be as good (more or less) as any to be found. But it is difficult to speak of the ' originality ' of such a culture ; there were variations of detail but the resemblances are more striking, and New England, in her heyday, appears as one of the contributory centres, along with Edinburgh and to some extent London, of a particular type of cultural development ; and after discussing the internal peculiarities of New England it is to that development, which was common to most of Europe for that matter, that one must look to in order to answer the larger questions of ' general meaning.'

The literary tradition had changed, of course, paralleling Europe and England, before Boston saw her brightest day of esteem, when Longfellow was read all over the world and when Emerson and Carlyle were exchanging visits ; for the influence of Burke and Dr. Johnson soon gave way to that of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goethe, Carlyle. But the essential temper of mind was not much changed, the spirit of emulation, the desire for ' improvement,' the unrelaxing effort. Here and there people were beginning to realize that something was wrong, Emerson for instance, to realize that the intellect and the will had got to be like a loom running without cotton. Margaret Fuller, who made the

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most penetrating remarks of all (although curiously enough she preserved her belief in man's ability to make himself into anything he wanted, even if that should be a Correggio), said of Emerson that ' he raised himself too early to the perpendicular and did not lie along the ground long enough.' As for all the lecturing and studying she remarked, ' The superficial diffusion of knowledge, unless attended by a corresponding deepening of its sources, is likely to vulgarize rather than raise the thought of a nation, depriving it of another sort of education through sentiments of reverence, and leading the multitude to believe themselves capable of judging what they but dimly discern . . . '

When Mr. Brooks comes to deal with the outstanding literary figures, his method, which is not literary criticism in the usual contemporary sense, but rather a reconstruction of the moods and aims of the articulate part of society (' literary history,' in short, just what he calls it), full of the charm of their particular existences, is satisfactory in just the degree that their lives and personalities are more interesting than any book they may have written, which is probably true of most of them, of Lowell, of Longfellow and Dr. Holmes (Mr. Brooks has an excellent chapter about the fundamental uncertainties of Lowell), although less true of Thoreau, and still less again of Hawthorne ; Hawthorne, who was not much taken with self-improvement and reformism, and who was almost alone in using folk-legends and deep-set folk attitudes in an imaginative fashion, deserves a more penetrating and elaborate treatment than Mr. Brooks supplies.

The charm of New England life, which he conveys so well, and which presumably led him to write this book, is real indeed, and particularly refreshing to people living in a harsher commercial environment, for whom its journals and letters and essays will always make pleasant reading. It is interesting to see that the charm was sentimentalized and exploited by one ' Ike Marvel ' even before the Civil War, for the benefit of the rapidly growing business class.

One is forced to admit, however, that the literary achievements were slender. Mr. Brooks' own reaction is to minimize the fact by sliding off at a tangent, emphasizing the charm, the peace of mind and idealism of his personages. Some reasons for the slenderness have already been given or implied: the limitation

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of the material to simple country pleasures, to Indian legends, to exhortations towards 'improvement,' arising from the limits which had been set to the New England mind at an earlier period and which had persisted ; the desire for a culture at any price, which tended to discourage criticism of American products, was also a factor ; literary expression tended to become watery even within the original limits ; Mr. Brooks admits that Emerson, despite his sound intuitions about poetry of an earlier period, was a bad or indulgent judge of the verse of his contemporaries. Lastly, although the exact degree of English influence upon the literary tradition of New England can always be argued, it is true that there was such an influence, doubtless aided by similarities of temperament, of language and of circumstance, and it can hardly be said that New England threw off the general limitations which prevailed on the other side of the Atlantic.

What one comes to ultimately, in thinking of the 'general meaning' of New England is the fundamental problem of nineteenth century culture, a problem which was posed by the *philosophes* of the preceding century when they, rationalizing the tendencies which had in turn preceded them, defined man as essentially an individual, who would at most consent to limit himself by a voluntary *contrat social*. He was free to develop himself as he chose and he was free to 'improve.' But the questions which were never answered, and indeed never asked, were what man's basic interests consisted of, and of what sort of stable 'improvement' he was capable. While the moralists of the nineteenth century went on urging improvement in the direction of knowledge and increased moral scruple, the rest of mankind, and unfortunately the majority, answered the question of their interests in a different fashion, turning to physical comfort, increased production, the excitement of competitive success. The modern business man still defends himself in the same words, citing his 'right to individual initiative.'

No one could deny the admirable qualities of various individuals, the learned artisans, the conscientious lecturers and the rest, whether in America or England, but the kind of effort they were making does seem to contain blindnesses which bring them into the blame for the final disintegration. Holding a most rarified conception of human nature, and at a time when external

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religious sanctions had as good as disappeared, they believed that men would restrain themselves for the benefit of society as a whole. One may argue that the movement into the West and into commercial enterprises (which spelled the end of the old New England culture) was inevitable under any circumstances ; the geography of America, in short, was too tempting. But the stability of the culture seems to have been amazingly slight ; in fact it would be impossible to imagine one which offered less resistance to disrupting forces. The very dissemination of knowledge, in a society which relied on such strict control and consciousness and which thus buried the sources of experience, had the opposite effect from the one intended ; for as Margaret Fuller said, 'the tendency of circumstances has been to make our people superficial, irreverent and more anxious to get a living than to live mentally and morally.' Like Emerson, the whole effort seemed to have risen too soon from the ground.

The restrictions were being relaxed, of course, to which end Emerson, Dr. Holmes and others argued, but while this slow process was going on the impatient majority were finding immediate satisfactions (or thinking they would at least) in the adventure of a commercial or a pioneering career, where the brake of the old aims and principles was rapidly worn down to nothing or turned into compromises and sentimentalities.

There is no better place to observe the beginning of the social split, between the practical people and the others, than in New England during the years about which Mr. Brooks writes. The adequate comment on the situation (not only in New England but in its parallels elsewhere) does not seem to be to look merely at the fineness and integrity of certain individuals, nor to look at the charm of the whole culture, while shutting one's eyes to its precariousness and its short life. The whole impulse or development ought to have lessons for educational theory ; Mr. Brooks supplies an excellent source—if not a guide—for its study.

DONALD CULVER.

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A FRENCH CRITIC

HISTOIRE DE LA LITTERATURE FRANCAISE DE 1789 A NOS JOURS, by Albert Thibaudet (Librairie Stock, Paris).

Until his death in 1936 Albert Thibaudet held, as critic and historian of French literature, a place which one felt to be unique though not easy to define. Like Amiel, one of his multifarious interests, Thibaudet lectured in the university of Geneva, but in a different age. Since the time of Brunetière, and before him since Taine, Frenchmen who have professed literature have been almost exclusively preoccupied with history, evolution, movements, developments ; with a ' scientific ' approach to ideological content at the expense of judgment ; with the rigorous separation of ingredients to the neglect of synthesis ; above all with the relations between works—sources, influences, comparisons, *confrontations*—rather than with the works themselves as literature. There have been sound textual critics among them ; but few, if any, have been concerned with taste.

Who, moreover, among Frenchmen of the nineteenth century, or so far of the twentieth, could qualify strictly as a literary critic? The genius of the nineteenth century in France as in England lay definitely in Irrelevance. Sainte-Beuve, for instance, was as sensitive as any of us are to the encroachments of philosophy and science ; but the thing for him was the man not the book. For the modern university critic the thing is not the book or the man but the background.

Albert Thibaudet, as we have known him chiefly through his regular contributions to the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (often the best pages in that declining periodical, though themselves unequal in value) did not conform to the dominant type of ' literary ' academic. In his attitude and asides one could detect subtle points of irony at its expense. Yet he had obviously an immense, detailed knowledge of history—so much of his country's literature, thought and politics at his finger tips that he juggled gratuitously with coincidences in a fashion that could be damaging to his style and infuriating to the unfortunate reader with no liking for fortuitous or forced or even felicitous concatenations, Rabelaisian enumerations or those local *crus* which it was a hobby of this critic to cultivate and whose inspiration may account for

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something bacchantic or at least bemusing in this dance of dates. The reader may turn up the ingenious parallelism on p. 114. The most *ingenuous* example I can find is this: *Il (Hugo) mourut à quatre-vingt-trois ans, comme Voltaire et Goethe.*

As a rule though, Thibaudet writes with a vigorous directness. And as his interests were inexhaustible, almost any paragraph in his work can reveal just that freshness of approach which one misses in the tomes of so many French researchers and others. *La critique est mort-née au principe et au cours de laquelle ne soit présent l'amour des Lettres.* There he speaks, hinting at his function, perhaps his limitation ; reminding one that to be critical does not mean merely to be censorious ; but also suggesting the suspicion that his own work may not have been sufficiently firm in judgment to last as criticism.

Foremost among his interests was literary history. Most if not all types of history writing seem obviously to suffer from an inherent difficulty of method. Apart from the question of selection, simultaneity of production or events, and even the chronological order in which works or events occur, have to be tampered with or sacrificed to make things fit into the shape of a book. How best to divide and group the synchronisms and sequences of literary facts from 1789 to 1914 was the problem Thibaudet set himself in writing another *Histoire de la littérature française.* He decided for an order by generations. Five of these, dating from 1789, 1820, 1850, 1885 and 1914, determine the subdivisions of the volume ; and so far the scheme succeeds. But the first round only is won by the historian: the problem rises unbeaten within each part. Hugo (1802-1885) is finished off in one chapter. The next starts with the Cénacles in which he, along with Deschamps and Nodier, appeared as neophytes. It ends with Gérard de Nerval whom we leave strung to his lamp-post (1855) as we turn to *Les débuts du théâtre romantique,* which evoke the year 1815.

Points like these would not be worth making had not the author raised the whole issue in his preface. His history can be read with pleasure and with profit—not perhaps by examinees, except on the chance that examiners may have read it. Thibaudet can put things usefully, though he rarely mentions a school or a movement. Some of his references to taste may strike readers of *Scrutiny* as questionable. *Le XIXe siècle restera peut-être dans*

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l'histoire le grand siècle, le siècle unique, de la critique (p. 82). *Un certain goût commun, formé par les disciplines classiques, a disparu. Un goût romantique commun ne lui a jamais succédé. Le monde littéraire a gagné en variété . . .* (p. 119). But he could be persuasive in orthodoxy. He is sure that there is ' something,' as Tennyson said of Whitman, in Victor Hugo, *le plus grand phénomène de la littérature française*. Perhaps there is after all.

P. MANSELL JONES.

DRAMA AND SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF JONSON, by L. C. Knights (Chatto and Windus, 12/6).

The examination of the social value of literature turns on the relation between the writer's sense of reality and that of his contemporaries, on the place the writer takes in the continuous engagement between men and their environment. Before generalities can be resolved into precise questions, one must start, as Mr. Knights does, by correlating the economic circumstances of a particular period with the prevalent attitudes towards social morality. Otherwise, the more delicate problems of value cannot even be posed with any assurance. Blinkered specialists, the economic, social, literary historians have mostly left each to the others the necessary task of synthesis ; and Mr. Knights' book is valuable if only because he carries it out.

He reduces the complicated social history of the Elizabethan-Jacobean period to an ordered and comprehensive summary, and presents it in such a way that the transition to direct literary criticism does not require a jerk. He has chosen dramatists who deal explicitly with social attitudes, Jonson, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, Massinger ; their vitality, he shows, their grasp of immediate realities and their ability to see them as part of the full range of social life, springs from their close contact with a healthy popular morality. They represent the traditions of the compact mediæval community in resistance to the acquisitive, amoral tendencies of capitalism. The substance of Jonson's plays is shown to be a judgment of attitudes and relationships set moving by the first great wave of capitalist speculation ; he confronts the principal economic dvelopments of the time with the assurance of

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sharing with his audience an inherited code of human experience. Though Jonson's plays, more than their contemporaries, reshape it in 'the light of a particular vision,' the code was common as well as personal. Writing such as his—'not because of what it describes, but because of what it embodies'—provides the best means of understanding the human problems of its time; and hence, a means of understanding our own.

Parts of Mr. Knights' argument have already appeared as articles in *Scrutiny* and the *Criterion*. He describes the traditional outlook, subordinating individual profit and economic activity in general to the moral ends of communal life, as the outlook of a localized economy, producing for subsistence; but, distinguishing too sharply between social ideals and bread-and-butter activities, he leaves unexamined the bearing on that outlook of the organization of the common-field system and the gilds, which, as he indicates, gave it its practical validity. Moreover, it was displaced, not only, as he implies, by the amoral individualism of monopolist projectors, but by Puritanism, which gained ground because it provided both an apologia for the middle classes and—as Weber's *Protestant Ethic* shows—a means of coming to grips with the new conditions of capitalist production. It is misleading to make the projectors the main representatives of the capitalist ethic in Jonson's time, in that middle-class individualism developed in oposition to them, and in opposition to what gave them their opportunities, the Crown's attempt to harness capitalism to the needs of the court. Mr. Knights, rejecting too easily the Marxist conception of class ideology, underrates the growing conflicts of interest within the old social order, and accepts at its face value the court's concern for a regulation of trade in the interest of peasant and artisan. The older nobility, in financial decline, were looking to the monopolies to stabilize their position; and the policy was maintained although it controverted its ostensible aim, that of assisting the workers in the monopolized industries. Mr. Knights treats its ill effects as the results of good intentions, badly administered; but, to the public, it represented, in effect, a systematic court rake-off, backed by the prerogative. Not only did the attempt to strengthen mediæval forms fail to solve the problems of economic disorganization, it interfered with existing occupations and threatened to choke development by hindering the free movement

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of capital. Hence the demand for freedom of access to markets became linked with the growing Puritan demand for greater flexibility in the system of callings, for individual liberty, and for parliamentary government. The ethics of capitalist society were not shaped, then, solely by the projectors who attached themselves to the court, but by wealthy and middle-class agricultural producers, by clothiers, by small traders, and by small master-workmen. Since Weber and Tawney have concentrated on a later stage of Puritan economic doctrine, it is not yet possible to estimate how far these men were abandoning, and how far reconstituting the traditional social morality ; but it would be one-sided to ignore their hostility to the motives of unqualified individualism, and the Crown's acquiescence in them.

Thus Jonson's attitude is both less akin to Dekker's (for example) and less flexible and inclusive than Mr. Knights suggests. Capitalism, as Jonson sees it, sets the stage for the clever scoundrel and the willing dupe ; it is Volpone's assurance that money is ' the dumb god, that gives all men tongues ' that enables him to prey on them, baiting them with ' expectation.' Productive labour, to Volpone, has become simply destructive, ' wounding ' the earth, ' fatting beasts to feed the shambles.' Jonson's irony is shaped by reference to his ideal of a stable hierarchy of social functions, in which feelings of common humanity can express themselves without distortion by the motives bred out of money. Hence, in his ' indictment of the newer forms of economic parasitism,' the counteragent he creates, the positive standard implied, is tied to the past ; although Volpone is ' placed,' there is a tension between accepting the actual world on the terms of Volpone's insight, which the play does not counterbalance, and turning away from it in aversion. Jonson creates nothing comparable to the positive value given, by *Othello*, for example, to the Moor's pride in his natural powers, his pride in an ' occupation . . . that makes ambition virtue ' ; the dominant impulses in his plays are made negative, almost inhibitory, in effect.

When these qualifications have been made, however, it remains that Mr. Knights has done a great deal to clarify—to establish —our understanding of Elizabethan drama and it relationship to its environment.

L. G. SALINGAR.

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